ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: A WORLD FOR ALL AND NONE: DE STIJL, MODERNISM, AND THE DECORATIVE ARTS

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In October 1917, the first issue of the journal *De Stijl* was printed in the Netherlands under the editorial leadership of Theo van Doesburg. The publication became a nexus around which a core group of progressive artists, architects, and designers were brought together. They all shared a similar goal: to be a platform through which a new aesthetic would be declared, one that would diagnose and resolve the social, cultural, and metaphysical conditions that had led to the First World War. The group's vision was totalizing, meant to encompass all forms of art, from armchairs to architecture.

This dissertation explores the position of the decorative arts within De Stijl's utopian project. The decorative arts were *the* bellwether of many of the principal social, cultural, and political problems that modernity brought to the fore. As a result, the polemics that emerged from the decorative arts profoundly informed the development of

De Stijl's artistic praxis and theoretical framework during the formative years of the group. By acknowledging the origins of many of De Stijl's intellectual and aesthetic positions within the decorative arts, this dissertation aims to present a renewed perspective on the group's formal projects in interior design, stained glass, and furniture.

By rooting the work of these artists within the instrumental role of the decorative arts, this dissertation gives needed attention to these essential, yet undertheorized aspects of De Stijl's utopian project to provide new insights into one of the most prominent artistic movements of the interwar period. In doing so, it endeavors to call for a broader reassessment of the intrinsic role the decorative arts played in the emergence of modernism broadly, and the practice of the European avant-garde specifically, in the years following World War I.

A WORLD FOR ALL AND NONE: DE STIJL, MODERNISM, AND THE DECORATIVE ARTS

by

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Part 1:
De Stijl Theory

1 Introduction: De Stijl, Modernism, and the Decorative Arts

In October 1917, the first issue of the journal *De Stijl: Maandblad voor de moderne beeldende vakken* (Style: A monthly magazine for modern visual subjects) was published under the editorial direction of the Dutch painter, designer, and critic Theo van Doesburg (1883–1931).[1] Founded in the Netherlands during the First World War, *De Stijl* was intended to be the platform through which to declare a new aesthetic, one that would respond to the metaphysical and social needs brought on by the tragedy and destruction of the conflict. The journal became the nexus around which Van Doesburg gathered a network of progressive artists, designers, and architects from within and beyond the Netherlands, most of whom shared a collective desire to design a new world for the "new man." Van Doesburg, as well as those who constituted the initial core of the De Stijl group—Piet Mondrian (1872–1944), Bart van der Leck (1876–1958), Vilmos Huszar (1884–1960), J. J. P. Oud (1890–1963), Jan Wils (1891–1972), Robert van 't Hoff (1887–1979), Antony Kok (1882–1969), Georges Vantongerloo (1886-1965), and later Gerrit Rietveld (1888–1964)—believed such a utopian vision could only arise through a

1. The journal's title was altered slightly for the second volume, to *De Stijl: Maandblad gewijd aan de moderne beeldende vakken en kultuur* (Style: A monthly magazine dedicated to modern visual subjects and culture). Finally, for the fourth volume it was permanently changed to *De Stijl: Maanblad voor nieuwe kunst, wetenschap en kultuur* (Style: A monthly magazine for the new art, science, and culture). The first issue was published in Delft by Harms Tiepen. The initial print run was a thousand copies, but the magazine never exceeded more than three hundred subscribers. See Sascha Bru, "'The Will to Style': The Dutch Contribution to the Avant-garde," in *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines, volume 3: Europe 1880–1940*, ed. Peter Brooker, Sascha Bru, Andrew Thacker, and Christian Weikop (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 303.

controlled, rational aesthetic, one best expressed by geometric abstraction.[2] De Stijl wished to disseminate this universalizing visual language—which Mondrian labeled *nieuwe beelding* (neo-plasticism), a term subsequently adopted by the members of the group—into all aspects of their lived environment. To accomplish this goal, De Stijl asserted the need to reconsider the primacy traditionally assigned to architecture and the isolated figure of the architect. In its place, the group proposed a collective and collaborative model of aesthetic production capable of negating such a tradition.[3] International in scope and ambition, and encompassing art forms extending from armchairs to architecture, their project was conceived as totalizing.

Van Doesburg's choice of *De Stijl* alluded to historical debates—particularly those of the nineteenth century—that explored the nature and significance of the decorative arts under the rubric of "style." In doing so, he set the De Stijl group's project in a broader historical discourse that extended back to the German architect Heinrich Hübsch's (1795–1863) 1828 treatise, *In What Style Should We Build?*. This discursive tradition treated seriously the decorative arts as well as architecture. Indeed, considerations of *both* the decorative arts and architecture shaped the writings of such figures as Gottfried Semper (1803–1879), John Ruskin (1819–1900), Alois Riegl (1858–

2. Kept from this list are several contributors to the early issues of *De Stijl*, such as Gino Severini, who remained mostly outside the network of consistent communication that formed among those who have been categorized here as the De Stijl group's initial affiliates.

3. Van Doesburg wrote, "As soon as the artists in the various visual arts come to recognize that they are, in principle, equal to one another, that they have a common language to speak, they will no longer fearfully cling to their individuality" [Zoodra de kunstenaars in de verschillende beeldende vakken tot de erkennning zullen komen, dat zij in principe aan elkaâr gelijk zijn, dat ze eene algemeene taal te spreken hebben, zullen ze niet meer angstvallig vasthouden aan hunne individualiteit]. Theo van Doesburg, "Ter inleiding" [Introduction], *De Stijl* 1, no. 1 (October 1917): 2; facsimile reprint (Amsterdam: Athenaeum and Polak & Van Gennep, 1968). Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are my own. All references to the facsimile will be given according to the original printing of the journal.

1905), and Hendrik Petrus Berlage (1856–1934), to list but a few principal writers to be addressed in the following chapters. All of these authors defined their respective present moments vis-à-vis the ideals of the past, as they endeavored to address what they felt to be a "crisis of style" in the decorative arts emerging from a number of modern phenomena: the flourishing of stylistic eclecticism; the invention and widespread implementation of novel materials, from electroplated metals to gutta-percha; and the uncertainty of value promulgated by the use of these materials in objects of industrial mass production. These architects, designers, and cultural critics believed the "crisis of style" reflected a crisis in Western society, of which the decorative arts were recognized as the foremost signal. For these aesthetic and social idealists, the position of the decorative arts—at the liminal point between art and daily life—proved to be best suited to address, and more importantly to redeem, the pernicious social conditions brought about by the tumult of modernity.

By choosing the word "style," Van Doesburg not only laid claim to this tradition of cultural discourse; he sought its ultimate resolution through the collaborative efforts of those in the De Stijl group.[4] To acknowledge De Stijl's participation in this tradition is to acknowledge a crucial, though long overlooked, dimension of the group's totalizing experiment. The decorative arts—including interior decoration, stained glass, and furniture design—were awarded by the artists themselves a privileged place both materially and philosophically in De Stijl's aesthetic project. Thus it is through a careful

4. Hans Janssen and Michael White, *The Story of De Stijl: Mondrian to Van Doesburg* (Burlington, Vermont: Lund Humphries, 2011), 12–13. Michael White translates the title of the journal as "The Style." The article "de," though, is grammatically regular, and normally carries no semantic weight. Gottfried Semper's, Semper's *Der Stil in den technischen und tektonischen Künsten*—to be discussed in the chapters that follow—for example, is translated as "Style in the Technical and Tectonic Arts."

consideration of the decorative arts that the De Stijl group's own ideological posture and aesthetic actions may be more completely and accurately understood.

De Stijl and Modernism in the Netherlands

De Stijl began amid a complex, and at times competing, set of responses to modernity that had been developing within the Netherlands since the closing decades of the nineteenth century. The social structure of the country, and its position internationally, fundamentally changed after the economic resurgence of the German Ruhr valley following the Franco-Prussian War in 1870.[5] The geographical location of the Netherlands situated the country at a crossroads of economic and cultural exchange in Europe, particularly between the two industrial powers of Germany and Great Britain.[6] This advantageous position stimulated a rapid process of industrialization, which, coupled with an agricultural crisis in the waning years of the century, led to the mass migration of rural labor to urban centers. Industrial cities such as Rotterdam absorbed much of this shifting population. Yet even many of the smaller cities along the coast between Rotterdam and Amsterdam, and inland to Utrecht, saw rapid urbanization, expanding simultaneously to form what became known as the Rim City (*Randstat*).[7] This accelerated period of urban development, however, brought with it problems of unhygienic working and living conditions. Prompted by the spread of organized labor unions and the rise in the political influence of socialist ideas, a new generation of social

5. See Jan Bank and Maarten van Buuren, *Dutch Culture in a European Perspective: volume 3: 1900: The Age of Bourgeois Culture* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 116.

6. Bank and Van Buuren, *Bourgeois Culture*, 116.

7. Paul Overy, *De Stijl* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1991), 19.

democratic parliamentarians arose. In 1902, the Dutch government responded by passing sweeping reform measures regarding public housing and health.[8]

The 1902 housing act led to intense debate on the form and nature of the modern domestic interior. These debates flowed into the cultural sphere, as critics, artists, architects, and designers engaged in heated polemics over differing approaches to the aesthetic and social problems posed by a rapidly changing built environment. Journals such as *De Nieuwe Tijd* (The new tide) and *De Nieuwe Gids* (The new guide), as well as those that catered more specifically to art and architectural criticism, like *De Kroniek* (The chronicle), *Architectura*, and *Bouwkundig Weekblad* (Architectural weekly), acted as platforms through which various aesthetic and social positions were proposed and defended.[9] These journals were met by new publications in the years after World War I, including *Wendingen* (Turnings)—the platform of the Amsterdam School—and *De Stijl* itself.

The opening years of the twentieth century also witnessed the growth of a new class of bourgeois industrialists and financiers. This emerging class sought to differentiate themselves from their traditional burgher counterparts, who had earlier consolidated their power through mercantile capitalism and had opposed the modernization of the Netherlands during the previous century. The more progressive members of this growing class turned away from the Romantic, anti-industrialist aesthetic of Hague School artists such as Jozef Israëls (1824–1911), seeking instead artists whose work reflected the modern and international spirit of their rapidly industrializing nation.

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8. Bank and Van Buuren, *Bourgeois Culture*, 130.
9. Jane Beckett, "Discoursing on Dutch Modernism," *Oxford Art Journal* 6, no. 2 (1983): 69.

Patrons such as Cornelis Bruynzeel, a manufacturer of wood products; stock broker Saloman B. Slijper; and shipping magnates Anton and Helene Kröller-Müller all supported progressive artists through purchases of works as well as commissions for interiors within their own homes.[10] These individuals gravitated toward the atelier that had formed around Berlage, as well as the circle of artists associated with the Moderne Kunstkring (Modern Art Society), which was formed in 1911. It was through their connections to these artistic circles that these wealthy patrons were first made aware of the artists of De Stijl, eventually becoming committed and influential supporters of the latter's work during and after the First World War.

The Moderne Kunstkring was also instrumental in introducing the work of the avant-garde to the Netherlands, through important annual exhibitions held at the Stedelijk Museum from 1911 until 1913.[11] Through these exhibitions, the work of Pablo Picasso (1881–1973) and of the Puteaux group, as well as the writings of Guillaume Apollinaire (1880–1918) and Henri Le Fauconnier (1881–1946), became available to a wider Dutch audience. In addition, the paintings of Wassily Kandinsky (1866–1944) were shown at the Gallery Oldenzeel in Rotterdam in 1912.[12] That year, the futurists held exhibitions in Rotterdam, The Hague, and Amsterdam, leading to greater circulation of the movement's manifestoes among artistic circles.[13] This interweaving of cubist, expressionist, and

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10. Overy, *De Stijl,* 34–35.

11. It was only with the World War that these exhibitions were brought to a halt. Jan van Adrichem, "The Introduction of Modern Art in Holland, Picasso as Pars pro Toto, 1910–30," *Simiolus: Netherlands Quarterly for the History of Art* 21, no. 3 (1992): 162–211.

12. Kandinsky's important text *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* (1912) was widely read throughout the Netherlands following the exhibition. Beckett, "Discoursing on Dutch Modernism," 73.

13. Beckett, "Discoursing on Dutch Modernism," 73.

futurist aesthetics in the Netherlands expanded the scope of discussions on the significance of abstraction, and had a formative impact on the artists of De Stijl.

From this environment of creative fecundity, De Stijl took its unique shape. As will be discussed over the course of this dissertation, the group's evolving heterogeneous theoretical positions formed in patchwork fashion through the combination of often competing ideas.[14] This rich, and at times conflicting, network of positions was mobilized in an attempt to resolve many of the perceived social, cultural, and philosophical challenges of modern life in the Netherlands. Whatever inconsistencies the artists demonstrated in their social or aesthetic formations were seemingly reconciled in their posture toward and embrace of the decorative arts as an effective device to engage productively the challenges of modern life.

Who's Afraid of the Decorative Arts?

Before proceeding, it necessary to clarify several terms that appear in the title of, and repeatedly throughout this dissertation. The first, and likely most surprising—particularly for De Stijl scholars—is the use of "decorative arts" to categorize a genre of specific projects carried out by the group. The artists of De Stijl, after all, frequently decried the decorative or applied arts.[15] They viewed the subordinate position of the decorative arts,

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14. Seldom did these artists read the original texts they cited, and more often than not, their knowledge of a topic came through secondary discussions in Dutch journals or correspondence. As a result, their interpretations of theoretical texts or ideas were punctuated by frequent misreadings. Allan Doig, *Theo van Doesburg: Painting into Architecture, Theory into Practice,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 12–13.

15. Vilmos Huszár, for example, would state in a lecture on the modern applied arts to the Second Congress of Modern Art held in Antwerp in 1922: "When I was to lecture about my thoughts on the question of the modern applied arts, it occurred to me that the word *applied art*, in the strict sense, does not belong with the *modern arts*. . . ." [Toen ik naar aanleiding van de vraag om over de moderne toegepaste kunst te spreken, hier over nadacht, kwam het mij voor dat 't word

and more importantly what was conventionally thought to be their superficial nature, as indicators of an anachronistic system of cultural and aesthetic values. These problems of hierarchy and appearance were precisely what De Stijl sought to overcome through the leveling and integration of all of the arts in a unified vision of the modern built environment. For this reason, the artists of De Stijl most often avoided describing their work as "decorative," and generally eschewed association with categories of the decorative arts. Instead they frequently used terms like "painting" (*schilderij*) as a semantic alternative to "ornamentation" or "interior decoration," as will be addressed in chapters 4 and 5.

Yet in spite of De Stijl's parlance and its claims to have established a new aesthetic that transcended the limitations of the "decorative," the group's theories and works nevertheless engaged a tradition that fell within the framework of the decorative arts. Van Doesburg, for example, admitted as much when describing *De Stijl* as initially being "only for the Fine and Applied Arts."[16] Furthermore, many of the De Stijl members had been trained in the decorative arts. Van der Leck, while often considered a painter, in

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toegepaste kunst in strikten zin niet behoort bij de *moderne kunsten*. . . .]. Vilmos Huszár, "Over de modern toegepaste kunst: Lezing gehouden door V. Huszar op het 2e Kongress van moderne kunst te Antwerpen 1922, 22 Januari" [On the modern applied arts: A lecture by V. Huszár at the second congress of modern art in Antwerp, January 22, 1922], published in two parts in *Bouwkundig Weekblad* 43, no. 7 (February 18, 1922) and no. 8 (February 25, 1922); the quoted passage is on p. 59.The language employed among De Stijl members to describe the decorative arts varied from text to text. This was due in part to the fluid state of the term in turn-of-the-century Netherlands. "The decorative arts" (*versieringskunst*), "applied art" (*kunstnijverheid* or *toegepaste kunst),* and "crafts" (*ambachts*) were at times employed to describe similar categories of objects. Adi Martis, "Terminology and Ideology," in *Industry and Design in The Netherlands, 1850–1950*, ed. Kras Reyer (Amsterdam: Stedelijk Museum, 1985), 15–21.

16. "[*De Stijl*] is alleen voor Beeldende Kunst en Kunstnijverheid." Letter from Van Doesburg to Antony Kok, May 19, 1917. Reprinted in *De Stijl overall absolute leiding: De briefwisseling tussen Theo van Doesburg en Antony Kok* [De Stijl absolute leadership throughout: The correspondence between Theo van Doesburg and Antony Kok], ed. Alied Ottevanger (Bussum, Netherlands: Thoth, 2008), 191.

fact began his artistic career vocationally as an apprentice in a stained-glass workshop before enrolling in the National School for Applied Art (Rijksschool voor Kunstnijverheid), where he continued his training in that trade along with methods of wall painting.[17] Additionally, Huszar had attended the School of Applied Art in Budapest, studying mural painting and decoration, before practicing painting in Munich en route to the Netherlands.[18] Finally, Van Doesburg—who was largely self-taught in all of his artistic endeavors—relied on these collaborators to inform his own engagement with the decorative arts.

Thus I have chosen to employ "decorative arts" to characterize the projects under consideration in this dissertation. The decorative arts is an overarching category under which so much of De Stijl's formative and most far-reaching work might be addressed. Moreover, for this discussion, it is a term that can be distinguished from the fine arts (music, poetry, architecture, painting, and sculpture)—even though both fields frequently intersected.[19] Promoting the decorative arts as a category, I aim to draw attention to the multifaceted careers of the artists of De Stijl which have historically been oversimplified in modernism's privileging of the fine arts of painting and architecture as its most decisive historical subjects.[20]

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17. See Cees Hilhorst, "Bart van der Leck," in *De Stijl: The Formative Years, 1917–1922*, ed. Carel Blotkamp (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1982), 154. While J. J. P. Oud, Robert van 't Hoff, and Jan Wils were all trained architects, it is often overlooked that Mondrian was the only artist among the group who had been principally educated as a painter.

18. Sjarel Ex, "Vilmos Huszar," in Blotkamp, *The Formative Years*, 78.

19. Isabelle Frank, ed., *The Theory of Decorative Art: An Anthology of European and American Writings, 1750–1940* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 1–18.

20. In this way, I intend for this project to follow in the footsteps of art historical investigations that have addressed the intersections of the decorative arts with high modernism, such as Nancy Troy, *Modernism and the Decorative Arts in France: Art Nouveau to Le Courbusier* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991); David Cottington, *Cubism and Its Histories* (Manchester:

The Shape of Modernism

Many of the persistent narratives concerning the position of De Stijl in the history of modernism, notably in the Anglophone literature, stem from Alfred Barr's foundational modernist text *Cubism and Abstract Art* (1936). Barr's teleological understanding of modernism relied on binary comparisons to construct a clear dialectical progression of formal styles, as diagramed in his famous flow chart. Subsequently reinforced by the postwar writings of Clement Greenberg, this progressive and decidedly formalist conception of modernism was intrinsically tied to the emergence of abstraction in modern Western fine arts. De Stijl's promotion of its abstract visual language gave the group pride of place in this teleological history of modernism.

To broaden the understanding of De Stijl theory and the group's work, I have approached modernism not through the stylistic modality of Barr, but rather through the approach outlined by Christopher Wilk. Wilk defined modernism in a manner that is well suited to a "designed world" often left outside the parameters of traditional formalist characterization of modernism. Drawing on the work of Marshall Berman, Wilk broadly asserted that "modernism represents the 'vision and values' that have enabled men and women to become the subjects and objects of modernization, 'to make their way through the maelstrom and make it their own.'"[21] Addressing the forms that modernism took, Wilk continued:

Manchester University Press, 2004); Jenny Anger, *Paul Klee and the Decorative in Modern Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); and exhibitions such as Markus Brüderlin, ed. *Ornament and Abstraction: The Dialogue between Non-Western, Modern and Contemporary Art* (Basel: Fondation Beyeler, 2001).

21. Christopher Wilk, "Introduction: What was Modernism?," in *Modernism: Designing a New World, 1914–1939*, ed. Christopher Wilk (London: V&A Publications, 2006), 17.

> Modernism was not conceived as a style, but was a loose collection of ideas. It was a term that covered a range of movements and styles in many countries, especially those flourishing in key cities in Germany and Holland, as well as in Moscow, Paris, Prague, and, later, New York. All of these sites were stages for an espousal of the new and, often, an equally vociferous rejection of history and tradition; a utopian desire to create a better world, to reinvent the world from scratch; an almost messianic belief in the power and potential of the machine and industrial technology; a rejection of applied ornament and decoration; an embrace of abstraction; and a belief in the unity of all the arts—that is, an acceptance that traditional hierarchies that separated the practices of art and design, as well as those that detached the arts from life, were unsuitable for a new era.[22]

By adopting such broad parameters for understanding the nature and practices of modernism, while also seeking to complicate them further, this dissertation looks beyond abstraction's role within the De Stijl project in order to redirect attention toward frequently underdiscussed aspects of the group's work.

In What Stijl Should We Build?

What constituted the boundaries and the nature of De Stijl has also remained a long-standing historiographical debate that stretches back to the journal itself. With the publication of *The Manifesto of De Stijl* in November 1918, Van Doesburg and the six other signatories attempted to present the group as unified in theory, membership, and style.[23] This, however, was far from the actual case. The artists of De Stijl were dispersed

22. Wilk, "Introduction: What was Modernism?," 13–14.

23. Theo van Doesburg, "Manifest I of 'The Style,' 1918" *De Stijl* 2, no. 1 (November 1918): 4. The additional signers of the manifesto were Huszar, Mondrian, Vantongerloo, Wils, Van 't Hoff, and Kok. Van der Leck had already left the orbit of De Stijl following disagreements regarding those who were making contributions to the group, and Oud declined to give his name to the manifesto to avoid direct association with the ideological platform being asserted.

across different cities within the Netherlands during the First World War, and then spread out to various countries after the end of the conflict. Most of these artists rarely met, and received much of their knowledge of each other's work through correspondence, photographic reproductions, and published texts, often in circulating journals other than *De Stijl*. Furthermore, the roster of artists associated with De Stijl was in a state of perpetual change, as ideological and interpersonal conflicts led to continued turnover among its participants.[24] Additionally, only one De Stijl exhibition was ever held, hosted by Léonce Rosenberg's Galerie l'Effort Moderne in Paris in 1923. The exhibition presented recent architectural and interior designs by several group members, to the exclusion of painting in general and the work of Mondrian in particular.[25] Yet the image of a homogeneous De Stijl theory and aesthetic persisted in the literature for nearly a half century following the end of the publication's run in 1932.

As access to a number of archives became more readily available, the 1980s witnessed a wave of literature that aimed to deconstruct previous monolithic representations of De Stijl.[26] This deconstruction of the unitary image of De Stijl turned

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24. In the jubilee issue of *De Stijl*, Van Doesburg provides a chart to map out the ever-changing list of collaborators. Theo van Doesburg, "Principal Collaborators in De Stijl: From 1917 to 1927," *De Stijl* 7, no. 79–84 (Jubilee Number, 1927), 59–62.

25. Michael White noted the oddity of this, considering that Rosenberg was Mondrian's dealer at the time. Michael White, *De Stijl and Dutch Modernism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), xiii.

26. Crucial to this turn was the traveling exhibition *De Stijl: Visions of Utopia 1917–1931* (1981), organized by the Walker Arts Center. The catalogue that accompanied the show included contributions from historians of both art and architecture, including Robert P. Welsh, Hans Jaffé, Rudolf Oxenaar, Nancy Troy, Sergio Polano, and Kenneth Frampton. The following year, Carel Blotkamp's edited volume *De Stijl: The Formative Years* was published in Dutch, and later in English in 1986. This book led to the publication of a number of important monographic surveys of De Stijl artists, including Els Hoek and Sjarel Ex's *Vilmos Huszar, schilder en ontwerper, 1884–1960: De Grote onbenkende van De Stijl* [Vilmos Huszár, painter and designer, 1884–1960: The great unknown artist of De Stijl] (Utrecht: Reflex, 1985).

defining the boundaries of the term into a methodological concern.[27] In response, Yve-Alain Bois presented an enduring and influential construction of De Stijl.[28] Bois argued there were three ways to define De Stijl: "as a *journal*, as a *group* of artists assembled around this publication, and De Stijl as an *idea* shared by the members of this group."[29] Bois discredited the utility of the former two definitions for their lack of clarity, noting that, as mentioned above, those who participated in the group were in perpetual change; and *De Stijl*, over the course of its publication, functioned as an open platform that voiced ideas from representatives of the entire European avant-garde. In their stead, Bois presented the "De Stijl idea" as a conceptual program that could best serve as a mechanism to discuss the disparate nature of the De Stijl project. According to Bois, the "De Stijl idea" was rooted in the two pillars of modernism: historicism, or the teleological dissolution of the arts into life; and essentialism, an ontological quest to uncover the fundamental elements of the arts in order to construct a universalizing visual language. In structuralist terms, Bois argued that the shared utopian principles of the "De

27. Allan Doig raised the issue of terminology: "The movement De Stijl could easily be equated with the journal *De Stijl* and hence the specific theoretical position of its editor Van Doesburg. But that would be to deny Mondrian's work after 1925 and Oud's housing at the Hook of Holland have the status of De Stijl (that is *De Stijl*) objects just because they did not always enjoy the favor of the editor. To equate the magazine and the movement in such a way is highly questionable, not to say unacceptable." See Doig, *Theo van Doesburg,* 6. In a later appraisal of De Stijl, Paul Overy went so far as to argue in postmodernist terms that "each history is grounded in its own time. There is no 'real' De Stijl which can be uncovered, if only we could go back to the primal (or primary) source. Each account of De Stijl, including this one, produces a new 'De Stijl' which is itself historically located and constructed." See Overy, *De Stijl*, 17.

28. In the sequel to the edited volume *The Formative Years*, Carel Blotkamp used Bois's notion of the "De Stijl idea" as a model to find continuity between the thematic chapters that review the varied activities of De Stijl artists during the 1920s. See Blotkamp, ed., *De vervolgjaren van De Stijl, 1922–1932* (Amsterdam: L. J. Veen, 1996). Michael White also used the "De Stijl idea" in his methodological approach to the movement. White, *De Stijl and Dutch Modernism,* 1–11.

29. Yve-Alain Bois, *Painting as Model* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993), 101.

Stijl idea" are syntactical in nature, operating according to the (retrospectively titled) processes of "elementarization" and "integration."[30]

Bois's notion of De Stijl as idea, however, derived from his idiosyncratic approach to structuralist thought and formalist art history, is not free from problems. His definition of De Stijl is both selective in its presentation of evidentiary works and homogeneous in its portrayal of De Stijl's ideological positions. While I will use "De Stijl" to reflect such a collective idea, I wish to move beyond the structuralist mechanisms that Bois used to characterize the group. By understanding De Stijl under a shared utopian aim—one that was historically shaped and determined—my project will seek to engage with a more flexible and nuanced understanding of the De Stijl idea as a historically rooted discourse—a discourse composed of often competing ideas and aesthetics for arriving at such an ideal. Thus while I use "De Stijl" throughout this dissertation in a general way to encompass the artists who contributed to the journal and to the ideas they shared, I do so acknowledging the varied and, at times, competing positions taken by the individual participants.[31]

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30. Bois defines the terms as follows: "*Elementarization*, that is, the analysis of each practice into discrete components and the reduction of these components to a few irreducible elements. *Integration*, that is, the exhaustive articulation of these elements into a syntactically indivisible, nonhierarchical whole." Bois, *Painting as Model*, 103.

31. In this way I follow Michael White's broader use of the term "De Stijl." See White, *De Stijl and Dutch Modernism*, xiv. Paul Overy has chosen to use the term "collaborators" to describe those within the De Stijl orbit, in recognition of Van Doesburg's use of the Dutch word "*medewerkers*"; see Overy, *De Stijl*, 13. I use the terms "member," "group," and "collaborator" interchangeably, although none of them precisely captures the nuanced relationship each individual figure had toward the collective whole we now historically understand as De Stijl.

Methodology

De Stijl was one of the longest running avant-garde journals, staying almost continually in print from 1917 until 1932—the year after Van Doesburg's death.[32] In order to narrow this broad temporal span, this project will focus on those texts and works produced by the De Stijl group from 1916—the year the group's ideas and participants first began to coalesce—through the exhibition of De Stijl architecture and interior design held at Léonce Rosenberg's Galerie l'Effort Moderne in 1923. While no clean divisions exist for the periodization of De Stijl's nearly decade and a half–long existence, this time frame encompasses the years in which the group's members remained largely in productive communication and collaboration with one another. Furthermore, these "formative years" constitute a crucial developmental period for De Stijl aesthetics and theory, during which time the group was most engaged with prewar discourses on the decorative arts. Van Doesburg's departure from Weimar to Paris, and the opening of the exhibition at Galerie l'Effort Moderne, marked the beginning of the end of this stage of De Stijl, after which time the group's aesthetic theories were subsumed by the transnational emergence of what would be characterized in 1932 as the "International Style."[33]

Such a temporal frame will allow me to be predominantly object-based in my analysis, utilizing groupings of related primary texts or visual works as models around

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32. Ninety issues of *De Stijl* appeared between October 1917 and January 1932, the month of the last issue, published posthumously after Van Doesburg's untimely death in Davos, Switzerland on March 7, 1931. The journal was published in Delft (1917–1918), Leiden (1918–1921), Scheveningen and The Hague (1922), Leiden (1923–1928), and finally in Muedon, France (1932). During this time, the journal was not published November–December 1920; January–February 1923; and 1929–1931.

33. The term was first used in the exhibition "Modern Architecture: International Exhibition," organized by the Museum of Modern Art, New York, in 1932. For an initial definition, see Philip

which to construct my discussion of De Stijl. These objects of inquiry will be theorized through and historicized within the wide range of discourses on the decorative arts—from both contemporaneous and nineteenth-century sources—with which the De Stijl group engaged repeatedly through 1923. To do so, I have drawn upon a varied collection of texts and theories stemming from a range of disciplines. For example, philosophical thinkers such as Georges Didi-Huberman and Michel Foucault provide models of thinking with which I was able to understand or explain the structure and nature of certain aspects of De Stijl projects. Important texts by historians and theorists of the decorative arts—including studies by Alina Payne and Jonathan Hay—have also been marshaled to understand the broader significance of these projects. These theoretical texts are complemented by the work of a number of Dutch scholars of the decorative arts who have infrequently been brought into dialogue with Anglophone De Stijl literature, such as Marjan Groot, Mienke Simon Thomas, and Carine Hoogveld, to name but a few. The overlap of architectural studies and the decorative arts served a pivotal role in my thinking on the relationship between De Stijl and the built environment. In this regard, the writings of architectural historian Robin Evans have played an informative role. Finally, the work of art historians Nancy Troy, Evert van Straaten, and Michael White have been particularly influential in my understanding of De Stijl.

This dissertation will be divided thematically into five case studies—broken into two parts—exploring key ideas pertinent to the De Stijl group's relationship to the decorative arts. The three chapters comprising Part 1 address the underlying philosophical and theoretical sources related to the decorative arts from which the De

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Johnson and Henry-Russel Hitchcock, *Modern Architecture: International Exhibition* (New

Stijl group drew. Chapter 2 examines the group's engagement with aesthetic debates on the nature of "style." Positioned at the intersection between Western history, culture, and aesthetics, "style" had come to be understood at the opening of the twentieth century as a crucial marker of social health. Wanting to upend the historicism within the decorative arts which De Stijl affiliates perceived as symptomatic of nineteenth-century decadence, and to replace it with a unified aesthetic suitable for the modern era, they engaged in the productive (mis)readings of such German philosophical figures as Friedrich Nietzsche and G. W. F. Hegel. By fusing the inventive praxis of Nietzschean "forgetting" with the universality of Hegelian aesthetics, the group built an intellectual foundation upon which to erect their vision of a new, modern "style." Chapter 3 follows this philosophical investigation by tracing the origins of De Stijl's core positions to ideas put forth by nineteenth- and early twentieth-century discourses on the decorative arts. From Gottfried Semper to Frank Lloyd Wright, this chapter will demonstrate that the modern treatises and polemics on the decorative arts produced by these (and other) thinkers informed and guided De Stijl's social and aesthetic interests as much as those of texts published by the historical avant-garde.

With the relationship between De Stijl theory and the history of the decorative arts established, focus will then be shifted in Part 2 to specific projects pursued by the group. Chapter 4 investigates the ubiquitous presence of the "developed surface interior"—an anachronistic mode of architectural drawing briefly popular during the eighteenth century, especially in Great Britain—in De Stijl interior design. The drafting method will be approached not as a neutral vessel for conveying an envisioned plan, but

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York: Museum of Modern Art, 1932), 13.

rather as a formal and conceptual framework within which De Stijl artists could think through and challenge nineteenth-century trends in interior design. Chapter 5 follows this discussion of the De Stijl interior with an investigation of Theo van Doesburg's interest in patterning and abstraction at the start of his career. It contextualizes his work within the reformation of craft schools and design pedagogy in the Netherlands that began at the end of the nineteenth century. Chapter 6 gives focused attention to the under-studied subject of stained glass—a medium that occupied a sizable portion of De Stijl's artistic output during its formative years. In order to explicate the significance of stained glass in De Stijl's conception of the interior, the chapter endeavors to theorize these works through the group's engagement with the writings of Nietzsche, as well as those on stained glass espoused by Bruno Taut. Finally, chapter 7 concludes with a reevaluation of the furniture designed by De Stijl members. Turning to several underexplored theoretical interests held by the group—including late nineteenth-century protophenomenological thinkers and in the dematerializing capacity of color—this chapter maps the strategies with which De Stijl reconfigured markers of class and domesticity inherent in the form and materiality of its furniture.

In the careful attention paid to both the theory and the history of the decorative arts, this dissertation relocates De Stijl's utopian vision for modern life back into the complex matrix of social, cultural, and aesthetic discourses in which it originally took shape. This totalizing project proved compelling to a diverse body of architects, decorative artists, and members of the avant-garde in the years immediately following the war. This was precisely because it endeavored to address many of the most outstanding problems that coincided with the emergence of modernity. By seeking to integrate

progressive avant-garde aesthetics with decorative art forms that directly engaged the experience of daily life, De Stijl necessarily embraced and advanced the history of the decorative arts. Moreover, it simultaneously enabled Van Doesburg and his innovative collaborators to reimagine their modern subjects and the very shapes of the environment they might inhabit.

2 The Style of History: Philosophical Paradoxes of De Stijl

When its founder Theo van Doesburg introduced the mission of the new periodical *De Stijl* to its readership in 1917, he did so ambitiously, announcing his goals in the following terms:

> [This periodical] will thus prepare the way for the possibility of a more profound artistic culture. . . . By serving the general principle, they themselves will be made to engender an organic style. . . . Only by consistently following this principle can the new plastic beauty manifest itself in all objects as a style born from a new relationship between the artist and society.[1]

At issue in Van Doesburg's introduction—and at the core of De Stijl theory—was the concept of "style" and its status in the opening years of the twentieth century. A term replete with meaning, style did not merely encompass the aesthetic concerns commonly associated with De Stijl's pursuit of pure geometric abstraction—the use of planes of black, white, and primary colors demarcated by black orthogonally arranged lines. Rather, "style" initially served as the unifying concept under which many of the shared principles of De Stijl theory could be rhetorically categorized.[2] By invoking the term "style," both in the introduction to and as the title of the group's journal, Van Doesburg

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1. "Het zal zoodoende de mogelijkheid voorbereiden eener verdiepte kunst cultuur. . . .Het algemeene principe diende zullen zij vanzelf een organischen stijl moeten voortbrengen. . . . Slechts bij consequente doorvoering van dit beginsel kan, uit eene nieuwe verhouding van kunstenaar tot samenleving, de nieuwe beeldende schoonheid zich in aalle voorwerpen als stijl gaan openbaren." Van Doesburg, "Ter inleiding," 1–2 (see chap. 1, n. 3).

2. This critical term in De Stijl theory has received attention only in passing among many art historians. See White, *De Stijl and Dutch Modernism,* 5–9 (see chap. 1, n. 25); as well as Overy, *De Stijl*, 8–9 (see chap. 1, n. 7). The reasons for this are many, ranging from the early substitution of "style" for the neologism *nieuwe beelding* to an overemphasis on De Stijl's antihistorical position.

set De Stijl's project within this discursive tradition which circulated principally around the decorative arts.

The discourse on style emerged with and was inherently connected to a sense of unease in nineteenth-century Europe, brought about by the perceived disruption of continuity between the present and the past. The rapid pace of technological change and social upheaval brought about by the industrial revolution produced an experience of temporal vertigo.[3] Felt to be a uniquely modern phenomenon, the nature of history became a topic of focused philosophical scrutiny over the course of the century. This philosophical examination turned to the realm of culture, specifically the manifestation of style in the decorative arts and architecture, to formulate an understanding of the present modern epoch in relation to the past. It was this shared engagement with the decorative arts by nineteenth-century philosophical thinkers and De Stijl artists, I will argue, that profoundly shaped the group's philosophical underpinnings in the years that followed World War I.

Historicism and the Problem of Stylistic Eclecticism

International in scope, the polemics surrounding the concept of style garnered significant attention by the middle of the nineteenth century, as artists, philosophers, and social theorists throughout Europe viewed modern trends of stylistic appropriation and eclecticism as symptomatic of the destabilizing pressures of industrialization and the market economy on Western society. Decorated objects, from chairs to the façades of

3. Philipp Blom has provided a broad survey of the pivotal years at the turn of the twentieth century, highlighting the contiguity of the issues faced by European thinkers before and after the World War I. See Philipp Blom, *The Vertigo Years, Europe, 1900–1914* (New York: Basic Books, 2008).

buildings, became reified subjects through which broader questions concerning the uncertain relationships between production and labor, appearance and value, and national and international identity were hotly contested. The First World War, which brought these problems acutely into the foreground of social consciousness, stimulated a reevaluation of these debates, as theorists associated the causes of the war with the same social and cultural ills that had beset the "crisis of style" within the decorative arts during the previous century.

Perceived to be at the root of this crisis was a problem fundamentally epistemological in nature: that is, one centered upon the accumulation of knowledge. This problem was manifested in a number of intellectual fields, but the liveliest debates on the subject occurred around the widespread recycling of styles from historical periods throughout the modern built environment. Viewed as a uniquely nineteenth-century phenomenon, the emergence of stylistic historicism arose out of the reshaping of urban centers throughout Europe. As cities expanded to accommodate increasing urban populations, medieval walls and Gothic quarters were razed to accommodate new construction projects. These rampant building programs occurred in conjunction with the establishment of new bureaucratic institutions within the emergent nation-states of Europe. These institutions insisted upon building programs that drew from established historical periods to denote the forms and functions of bureaucratic states for their swelling proletarian and petit-bourgeois classes.[4] From Charles Barry's (1795–1860) and Augustus Welby Northmore Pugin's (1812–1852) designs for the neo-Gothic restoration of the Palace of Westminster (1840–76), or Pierre Cuypers's (1827–1921) neo-

Renaissance design for the Rijksmuseum (1876–85), to the later paradigmatic amalgam of neoclassical, neo-Baroque, and neo-Renaissance buildings dotting the Vienna *Ringstrasse*, the symptoms of this revivalist movement were ubiquitous. Such stylistic appropriations were not limited to monumental state buildings, but also grew popular among the parvenu of the industrial and middle classes. This was seen, for example, during the post-unification economic boom of the 1870s, with the popularity of the *Gründerzeitvilla* among the German middle classes, who sought to advance their perceived social status by mimicking the historical forms of aristocratic *palais* in their private urban villas.[5] Significantly for our purpose, the revival of historical styles of ornamentation was evident in utilitarian objects as well. The 1851 Great Exhibition in London was a watershed moment which highlighted this phenomenon, as decorative objects sourced from around the globe and made through novel forms of industrial mass production were collected and placed on display in Hyde Park. In response to the overwhelming heterogeneity of historical styles of ornament visible at the Great Exhibition, Ralph Nicholson Wornum (1812–1877), in his widely read review "The Exhibition as a Lesson in Taste," was compelled to establish nine typologies of style to help structure and guide the aesthetic judgements of the event's petit-bourgeois visitors.[6]

The eruption of stylistic historicism by the mid-nineteenth century did not arise strictly from, nor was it limited to the realm of aesthetics. Rather, its emergence was intrinsically tied to the somewhat earlier development of a modern philosophy of history,

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4. See Maiken Umbach, "Memory and Historicism: Reading Between the lines of the Built Environment, Germany, c. 1900," *Representations* 88, no. 1 (Fall 2004): 35.

5. Umbach, "Memory and Historicism," 29–30.

6. See Ralph Nicholson Wornum, "The Exhibition as a Lesson in Taste," in *The Art Journal Illustrated Catalogue: The Industry of All Nations, 1851* (London, 1851): I***–XXII***.

which spurred new modes of historical inquiry and thought. The two fields, however, were interwoven through the archeological and aesthetic studies of such prominent eighteenth-century thinkers as Johann Winckelmann (1717–1768) and Christian Heyne (1729–1812), who both relied on style as a marker of temporality, morality, and knowledge.[7] This shift in historical inquiry occurred during the last quarter of the eighteenth century, as the centuries-long historiographical structure of *historia magistra vitae* began to erode.[8] As Mari Hvattum summarized, "For classical authors such as Thucydides and Cicero, history was not an abstract unity, but rather a collection of concrete examples that guided ethical and political conduct."[9] This contained mode of historical exegesis, Reinhard Koselleck has contended, began to be replaced around the opening of the nineteenth century by a unified idea of history. Koselleck traced this conceptual turn philologically through the shifting description of history as a plurality of accounts or events—as histories—to a history that coalesced such events and accounts under a singular notion of the past.[10] The German philosopher Johann Gottfried Herder (1744–1803) made an important contribution to this changing understanding of history

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7. Allan Megill has argued convincingly regarding the influential role that contemporaneous debates on aesthetics played in this shift in historical thinking at the end of the eighteenth century. See Allen Megill, "Aesthetic Theory and Historical Consciousness in the Eighteenth Century," *History and Theory* 17, no. 1 (1978): 29–62. M. Kay Flavell has also charted the importance of Winckelmann's writings on early historical thought. See M. Kay Flavell, "Winckelmann and the German Enlightenment: On the Recovery and Uses of the Past," *The Modern Language Review* 71, no. 1 (January 1979): 79–96.

8. Reinhard Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1985), 26.

9. Mari Hvattum, *Gottfried Semper and the Problem of Historicism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 163.

10. "In the German language, then, *Geschichte*(*n*)—from the singular forms *das Geschichte* and *die Geschicht*—were both plural forms, referring to a corresponding number of individual examples. It is really interesting to follow the imperceptible and unconscious manner in which, ultimately with the aid of extensive theoretical reflection, the plural form *die Geschichte* condensed into a collective singular." Koselleck, *Futures Past,* 31–42.

with his treatise, *Another Philosophy of History for the Education of Human Kind*. In this text Herder made the early argument:

> If I succeeded in *binding together* the most disparate scenes without confusing them—to show how they *relate* to one other, *grow* out of one another, *lose* themselves in one other, all individually only moments, only through the progression *means to purpose*—what a *sight!* What a noble *application of human history!*, what *encouragement* to hope, to *act*, to *believe*, even where one sees *nothing* or *not everything*.[11]

By the opening decades of the nineteenth century, the implications of Herder's unified notion of history were embraced by a number of later philosophers of history. For example, Wilhelm von Humboldt (1776–1835), in his 1822 essay "On the Historian's Task," declared:

> History does not primarily serve us by showing us through specific examples, often misleading and rarely enlightening, what to do and what to avoid. History's true and immeasurable usefulness lies rather in its power to enliven and refine our sense of acting on reality, and this occurs more through the *form* attached to events than through the events themselves.[12]

Recalling Herder, Humboldt viewed history as no longer organized through discrete exemplary events; instead, history acted as an invisible unifying and governing force to which past events were tied to an organic whole.[13] As he argued:

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11. Johann Gottfried Herder, "This Too a Philosophy of History for the Formation of Humanity" [Auch eine Philosophie der Geschichte zur Bildung der Menschheit] (1774), trans. in *Herder: Philosophical Writings*, ed. Michael N. Forster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 299.

12. Wilhelm von Humboldt, "On the Historian's Task," *History and Theory* 6, no. 1 (1967): 60–61. (Emphasis mine.)

13. Hayden White, quoting Ernst Cassirer, noted the significance of Herder's treatise *Ideas on the Philosophy of the History of Mankind* [Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte des Menschheits]

> An event, however, is only partially visible in the world of the senses; the rest has to be added by intuition, inference, and guesswork. The manifestations of an event are scattered, disjointed, isolated; what it is that gives unity to this patchwork, puts the isolated fragment into its proper perspective, and gives shape to the whole, remains removed from direct observation.[14]

According to Humboldt, the task of the historian had evolved. It now demanded that the historian elucidate the unifying principles and characteristics that gave form to a particular period of historical events and their agents. History was now conceived as internally coherent. Such a view was conveyed by G. W. F. Hegel (1770–1831), who argued in his posthumously published text, *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* (1837): "Each period is involved in such peculiar circumstances, exhibits a condition of things so strictly idiosyncratic, that its conduct must be regulated by considerations connected with itself, and itself alone."[15]

Herder had established the modern foundations for this understanding of history with his employment of the concept of *Volksgeist*. As Hvattum argued, "Whereas for Montesquieu and the enlightenment historians, national character was primarily connected to place—to climate, soil, and topography—for Herder, it became primarily *temporal*. . . ."[16] With Herder, and more famously Hegel thereafter through his concept of

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(1784–91), "These phases [of history] are not separated from one another, they exist only in and by virtue of the whole. But each phase is equally indispensable. It is from such complete heterogeneity that real unity emerges, which is conceivable only as the unity of a process, not as a sameness among existing things." See Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973), 74–75.

14. Von Humboldt, "Historian's Task," 57–58.

15. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, trans. J. Sibree (Kitchener, Ontario: Batoche Books, 2001, revised from the 1956 edition), 19–20. Hegel makes this point against what he describes as the outdated mode of "pragmatical history," that being the term he used for the structure of *historia magistra vitae.*

16. Emphais in the original. Hvattum, *Gottfried Semper*, 166.

the *Zeitgeist*, the "spirit of the age" became a core temporalizing device for delineating the boundaries of a specific historical epoch. Hegel's system of historical evolution transcended and linked such epochal boundaries, unifying historical time within a single continuum under the governing logic of the dialectic.[17] For Hegel, however, the modern moment signaled the beginning of an end to his dialectical unfurling of historical periods toward greater freedom, as he sensed early on a historical chasm between the temporal nature of the present and that of the past.[18] He noted in the preface to *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807):

> It is not difficult to see that ours is a birth-time and a period of transition to a new era. Spirit has broken with the world it has hitherto inhabited and imagined, and is of a mind to submerge it in the past, and in the labor of its own transformation. Spirit is indeed never at rest but always engaged in moving forward. But just as the first breath drawn by a child after its long, quiet nourishment breaks the gradualness of merely quantitative growth—there is a qualitative leap, and the child is born—so likewise the Spirit in its formation matures slowly and quietly into its new shape, dissolving bit by bit the structure of its previous world, whose tottering state is only hinted at by isolated symptoms.[19]

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17. Hegel provided the initial metaphor for what later became described as the triad of thesis, antithesis, synthesis in *Phenomenology of Spirit*: "It does not comprehend the diversity of philosophical systems as the progressive unfolding of truth, but rather sees in it simple disagreements. The bud disappears in the bursting-forth of the blossom, and one might say that the former is refuted by the latter; similarly, when the fruit appears, the blossom is shown up in its turn as a false manifestation of the plant, and the fruit now emerges as the truth of it instead. These forms are not just distinguished from one another, they also supplant one another as mutually incompatible. Yet at the same time their fluid nature makes them moments of an organic unity in which they not only do not conflict, but in which each is as necessary as the other; and this mutual necessity alone constitutes the life of the whole." See Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit,* trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 2.

18. William Maker, "The End of History and the Nihilism of Becoming," in *Hegel and History*, ed. Will Dudley (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2009), 18–19.

19. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 6.

Hegel's statement hints at the particularly modern sense of temporal vertigo brought on by the era's "qualitative leap" forward; its sudden bringing into focus of a present that negates the past and a future that remains expansively open and uncertain. Hegel's philosophy of history put forth a crucial question: if the modern era represented a fundamentally different epoch from those before, how was it to express the nature and the limits of this difference?

To resolve such a question and define the nature of the modern era, various hermeneutical approaches to historical interpretation were needed to properly define the historical consciousness that characterized past epochs. Style, as it was manifested in architectural and decorative ornament, became an indispensable tool for this hermeneutical project, for it served as a universal signifier of the social, political, and philosophical conditions that gave rise to a particular civilization's *Geist*, and thus an important marker of periodization. Each style obtained its own inherent cultural and aesthetic value as a manifestation of a given historical consciousness. By the second quarter of the nineteenth century, every historical style—be it Roman or Renaissance—was conceived of as a different, yet analogous, formal system which conveyed its own historically constituted moral and aesthetic values.[20] As a result, the dominance of neoclassicism in the eighteenth century began to wane, as it could no longer maintain its cultural and aesthetic focus on a priori, transcendental conceptions of classical beauty alone. The idealist arguments made by Winckelmann, and later Aloys Ludwig Hirt (1759–1837)—that current architecture could only achieve worth through the imitation of Greco-Roman examples—were increasingly challenged by those who maintained more

20. Hvattum, *Gottfried Semper*, 150.

relativist positions. One such example was the architect Heinrich Hübsch's (1795–1863) critique of neoclassicism's aesthetic absolutism, arguing, as Barry Bergdoll noted, that "Greek architecture would continue to embody essential truths about architecture, but these were not truths instructive for the modern architect except through analytical reflection and interpretation."[21] Several decades later, the French architect and theorist Eugène Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc would make a similar argument against the transcendental value of Classicism in defense of the Gothic revival. Citing the developments in the study of history, he wrote:

> Our era, and our era alone, since the beginning of recorded history, has assumed toward the past a quite exceptional attitude as far as history is concerned. Our age has wished to analyze the past, classify it, compare it, and write its complete history, following step-by-step the procession, the progress, and the various transformations of humanity. A fact as novel as this new analytical attitude of our era cannot be dismissed, as some superficial observers have imagined, as merely some kind of temporary fashion, or whim, or weakness on our part. . . . Europeans of our age have arrived at a stage in the development of human intelligence where, as they accelerate their forward pace, and perhaps precisely because they are already advancing so rapidly, they also feel a deep need to re-create the entire human past, almost as one might collect an extensive library as the basis for further labors. . . . Should not the discrediting of old prejudices and the discovery of forgotten truths rank among the most effective methods of ensuring true progress?[22]

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21. See Barry Bergdoll, "Archaeology vs History: Heinrich Hübsch's Critique of Neoclassicism and the Beginnings of Historicism in German Architectural Theory," *Oxford Art Journal* 5, no. 2 (1983): 3.

22. Eugène Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc, *The Foundations of Architecture: Selections from the Dictionnaire Raisonné*, trans. Kenneth D. Whitehead (New York: George Braziller, 1990), 197–98.

Neoclassicism became one of many equally valid styles, each an accessible autonomous system of differing aesthetic forms that could be marshaled as means to convey a specific set of historically based social and moral ideals for didactic ends, but with its richest meaning only for a specific historical moment and place.

Yet by the middle of the nineteenth century, the plurality of stylistic revivals that emerged from this shifting conception of and subsequent relation to history brought a sense of historical confusion. The German architect and theorist Gottfried Semper expressed the fear shared by many of his contemporaries that society had come to resemble "a kind of Babel," under which aesthetic "confusion" in general and stylistic heterogeneity in particular had arisen as a uniquely modern problem.[23] Modernity, unlike any era before it, had arrived at the point where it self-consciously viewed itself as one of a series of inherently coherent, yet distinct, epochs of historical consciousness linked through a metahistorical logic of progress. What was evident to Semper had also been clear to Heinrich Hübsch when in 1828 he sought to bring attention to the "crisis of present-day architecture"; that being the perceived absence of a uniquely original and unifying style that would characterize the ethos underlying the modern era, as all epochs of cultural importance were believed to have done. In the past, each style had emerged as a representation of its own historical present. With the current heterogeneity of styles, it was felt that art had lost its ability to respond adequately to the needs of the "modern man" in a new age defined by industrialization and urbanization. Jürgen Habermas described this urge of many reformers in architecture and the decorative arts to establish a

23. Gottfried Semper, *Wissenschaft, Industrie und Kunst: Vorschläge zur Anregung nationalen Kunstgefühls* [Science, industry, and art: Proposals for the development of a national taste in art]

definitively modern episteme as follows: "Modernity can and will no longer borrow the criteria by which it takes its orientation from the models supplied by another epoch; *it has to create its normativity out of itself.* Modernity sees itself cast back upon itself without any possibility of escape."[24] In the wake of World War I, the artists of De Stijl were compelled by this same demand. In their claim for "a style born from a new relationship between the artist and society," they consciously and strategically positioned themselves in relation to this larger discourse on style, its significance within the built environment, and its necessity in identifying how "modern man" could live in their own time.

A Style of Forgetting: The Nietzschean Foundations of De Stijl Theory

In 1917, Van Doesburg introduced the mission of *De Stijl* to its readers in decisively historicist terms: "[This little periodical] wishes to make modern man aware of the new ideas that have sprung up in the plastic arts. It wants to pose the logical principles of a maturing style—based upon a clearer relation between the spirit of the age and the means of expression—in opposition to the archaic confusion, the 'modern baroque.'"[25] He addressed this problematic position toward historical tradition more emphatically the following year in the "Manifesto of De Stijl," published the month before the signing of the Armistice that brought an end to the First World War. The manifesto moved beyond mere opposition to past stylistic traditions and into a more direct rejection of the past as a whole, declaring: "There is an old and a new consciousness of time. The old is connected

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(Braunschweig, 1855), in *Gottfried Semper: The Four Elements of Architecture and Other Writings,* trans. Henry Francis Mallgrave (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 130.

24. Jurgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, trans. Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987), 7.

with the individual. The new is connected with the universal. . . . The war is destroying the old world with its contents. . . . The founders of the new plastic art therefore call upon all, who believe in the reformation of art and culture, to annihilate these obstacles of development. . . ."[26] The position taken by the artists of De Stijl in the group's manifesto alluded directly to Filippo Tommaso Marinetti's prewar clarion call "to destroy museums, libraries, academies of every sort."[27] Yet unlike the reactionary politics that drove the antihistorical position of the prewar futurists—or for that matter the nihilistic impulse at the core of dadaists' practice during the war—De Stijl's relationship to the issue of history was tethered to a discourse within art history and philosophy that used style in the decorative arts and architecture as a historical tool to diagnose the perceived deteriorating aesthetic and social conditions that coincided with the rise of modernity. De Stijl's concern with this discourse became acute with the upending of Europe's social, political, and cultural order following the First World War. The artists of De Stijl understood stylistic eclecticism as a symptomatic manifestation of such social and cultural ills. They believed that a new aesthetic freed from past stylistic traditions was the only solution to ameliorating such cultural and social problems.

To this end, Friedrich Nietzsche's writings on art, culture, and history served as a philosophical cornerstone of De Stijl's formulation of its conceptual program. Although infrequently cited in discussions of De Stijl theory, Nietzsche's ideas were certainly well known to the artists of De Stijl generally—*Thus Spoke Zarathustra* was included in their

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25. Van Doesburg, "Ter inleiding," 1–2.

26. Theo van Doesburg, et al., "Manifesto I of 'The Style,' 1918," *De Stijl* 2, no. 1 (November 1918): 4.

library published in *De Stijl* in 1919[28]—and by Van Doesburg in particular, whose admiration for Nietzsche had begun as early as 1905.[29] Nietzsche's broad critiques of Western moral and cultural values, as well as his assertion of art's principal role in the reaffirmation of cultural life for the modern era, were absorbed into De Stijl's response to the material and cultural conditions of Europe after the World War I.[30]

Nietzsche's wide-ranging critique of European tradition and the burden that it placed upon the present served as an important intellectual model for De Stijl theory. In the second book of Nietzsche's *Untimely Meditations*, "On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life," published in 1874, Nietzsche argued against the life-rejecting obsession with historical study that had taken hold in nineteenth-century academic and cultural thought, warning that "it is possible to value the study of history to such a degree that life becomes stunted and degenerate—a phenomenon we are now forced to acknowledge, painful though this may be, in the face of certain striking symptoms of our

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27. Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, "The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism," *Le Figaro* (Paris), February 20, 1909, in *Futurism: An Anthology*, ed. Lawrence Rainey, Christine Poggi, and Laura Wittman (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 51.

28. The introduction to the library reads, "For subscribers of this monthly magazine, a few collaborators present the following works available for reading, which, whether directly or indirectly, relate to the reformation of art" [Voor abonné's van dit Maandblad stellen eenige medewerkers onderstaande werken, die hetzij direct of indirect, op de hervorming der kunst betrekking heben, ter lezing beschikbaar]. See "Boeken," *De Stijl* 2, no. 6 (April 1919): 70–72. In addition to *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, the philosopher Alois Riehl's 1903 text, *An Introduction to Contemporary Philosophy* [Zur Einführung in die Philosophie der Gegenwart] was also listed in the De Stijl library. Riehl's book included a review of Nietzsche's general concepts.

29. In 1907, Van Doesburg created a plaster bust of the German philosopher from which he produced a number of early drawings. He also produced a portrait of his close friend, the Dutch poet Evert Rinsema (1880–1958), in the guise of Nietzsche. The drawing appears to be modeled on an etching by Hans Olde, reproduced in the German magazine *Pan* 5, no. 4 (1900), 233. See Bruce Davis, *German Expressionist Prints and Drawings: Volume 2* (Los Angeles: County Museum of Art, 1989), 579.

30. The earliest record of Van Doesburg's awareness of Nietzschean ideas is in a diary entry from August 2, 1905, in which he briefly notes Nietzsche's concept of the "Übermensch." RKD - Nederlands Instituut voor Kunstgeschiedenis, Den Haag.

age."[31] Nietzsche presented two types of historical thinking which, he argued, had led to a stunted relationship between Western society and the present. The first, "monumental history," he described as a chain of great historical moments that "unites mankind across the millennia like a range of mountain peaks."[32] This mode of historical thought, according to Nietzsche, was inherently partial, identifying and celebrating only the most significant moments of history. For "the man of the present," the usefulness of monumental history was its resistance to cultural pessimism by showing that "the greatness that once existed was in any event once *possible* and may thus be possible again."[33] Yet such an idealized vision of the past, Nietzsche warned, threatened ideologically to devolve history into myth, on the one hand, and on the other aesthetically to lead to the dismissal and suppression of new styles that are "lacking in the authority conferred by history."[34] Where monumental history's heroic values pulled a society into a mythic past filled with lacunae, Nietzsche's second mode of historical study, antiquarian history, turned away from the present in a crippling need to reconstruct the totality of history through the acquisition of its endless fragments. At the core of his rejection of antiquarian history was its potential for historical relativism and a "lack of discriminating

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31. Friedrich Nietzsche, "On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life" trans. R. J. Hollingdale, in *Nietzsche: Untimely Meditations*, ed. Daniel Breazeale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 59.

32. Nietzsche, "Uses and Disadvantages," 68.

33. Nietzsche, "Uses and Disadvantages," 69.

34. Nietzsche wrote, "Monumental history deceives by analogies: with seductive similarities it inspires the courageous to foolhardiness and the inspired to fanaticism; and when we go on to think of this kind of history in the hands and heads of gifted egoists and visionary scoundrels, then we see empires destroyed, princes murdered, wars and revolutions launched and the number of historical 'effects in themselves,' that is to say, effects without sufficient cause, again augmented." Nietzsche, "Uses and Disadvantages," 71. Christian Emden has traced the nationalist politics that underpinned Nietzsche's identification and diagnosis of monumental history within the recently unified Imperial Germany. See Christian J. Emden, *Friedrich Nietzsche and the Politics of History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 150–56.

value," as this method "cannot relate what it sees to anything else and it therefore accords everything it sees equal importance and therefore to each individual thing too great importance."[35] This led to a "repulsive spectacle of a blind rage for collecting," Nietzsche argued, which "knows only how to *preserve* life, not how to engender it."[36]

Nietzsche's concern with the "consuming fever of history" overlapped with that of his worries around the nature of culture in late nineteenth-century Germany. In the first *Untimely Meditation,* "David Strauss, the Confessor and the Writer," Nietzsche defined culture as "above all, [the] unity of artistic style in all the expressions of the life of a people."[37] Nietzsche lamented, however, that such a unitary notion of culture had been lost among the "grotesque juxtaposition and confusion of different styles" that had come to define the built environment and instruct the modern German citizen. He elaborated: "The German amasses around him the forms and colors, productions and curiosities of every age and every clime, and produces that modern fairground motley which his learned colleagues are then obliged to observe and classify as the 'modern as such,' while he himself remains seated calmly in the midst of the tumult."[38] For Nietzsche, this "tumult," expressed through the imitation of past historical styles and cultural traditions

35. Nietzsche, "Uses and Disadvantages," 74.

36. Nietzsche, "Uses and Disadvantages," 75.

37. Friedrich Nietzsche, "David Strauss: Der Bekenner und der Schriftsteller" [David Strauss: The confessor and the writer], trans. R. J. Hollingdale, in *Nietzsche: Untimely Meditations*, 5. Nietzsche's thoughts on style were influenced by his reading of Gottfried Semper's treatise *Der Stil* in the summer of 1869. See Harry Francis Mallgrave, "Introduction," in Gottfried Semper, *Style in the Technical and Tectonic Arts; or, Practical Aesthetics*, ed. and trans. Harry Francis Mallgrave (Santa Monica: Getty Research Institute, 2004), 51.

38. Nietzsche, "David Strauss," 6. Nietzsche's primary target is the cultural jubilation he witnessed in Germany following the Franco-Prussian War. He notes at the beginning of this essay that that such a euphoria masked the German people's lack of genuine culture.

and accepted by a class of bourgeois Germans he labeled "cultural philistines," was at the center of the present "degenerate culture."

Aesthetics and history were core symptoms in Nietzsche's view of the decadence and decline of modern cultural life. Hence Nietzsche saw the modern age's relationship to the past through a similar life-denying lens, arguing in "On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life":

> The oversaturation of an age with history seems to me to be hostile and dangerous to life in five respects: such an excess creates that contrast between inner and outer . . . and thereby weakens the personality; it leads an age to imagine that it possesses the array of virtues, justice, to a greater degree than any other age; it disrupts the instincts of a people and hinders the individual no less than the whole in the attainment of maturity; it implants the belief, harmful at any time, in the old age of mankind that one is a latecomer and epigone; it leads an age into a dangerous mood of irony in regard to itself and subsequently into the even more dangerous mood of cynicism: in this mood, however, it develops more and more a prudent practical egoism through which the forces of life are paralyzed and at last destroyed.[39]

In order to counter such a resigned relation to the present, Nietzsche asserted the need for a "critical" mode of historical thought; one that constructively oscillated between his two approaches to historical study.

Essential to this process is the act of productive "forgetting" to cast aside the weight of historical precedent and tradition. Nietzsche noted the life-affirming nature of this act, writing, "it is altogether impossible to live at all without forgetting. . . . *There is a degree of sleeplessness, of rumination, of the historical sense, which is harmful and*

39. Nietzsche, "Uses and Disadvantages," 88.

ultimately fatal to the living thing, whether this living thing be a man or a culture."[40] By rejecting the past selectively, Nietzsche contended, it is possible to construct a new culture appropriate for the present, modern age. Yet this act of forgetting is not a complete amnesia. Rather, this ahistorical thinking must be balanced, when needed, with a critical confrontation of the past. "For since we are the outcomes of earlier generations," Nietzsche argues, "we are also the outcome of their aberrations, passions and errors, and indeed of their crimes; it is not possible wholly to free oneself from this chain. . . . The best we can do is confront our inherited and hereditary nature with our knowledge . . . and through a new, stern discipline combat our inborn heritage and implant in ourselves, a new habit, a new instinct, a second nature, so that our first nature withers away."[41] Nietzsche's polemics toward history sought to reinforce the need for a "transvaluation" of the present, one that rejected the "philistine" imitation of the past, and the cynical view of the present as an afterglow following the climax of the Hegelian "world-process," which Nietzsche critically noted "coincided with [Hegel's] own existence in Berlin."[42]

Van Doesburg rejected the stunting of creative thought brought on by the orthodoxy of academicism, arguing that the "bankruptcy of the bourgeois intelligentsia" had exhausted the meanings of past artistic styles through imitation, leaving only a simulacrum of culture for the modern age.[43] Nietzsche frequently invoked the notion of

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40. Nietzsche, "Uses and Disadvantages," 62.

41. Nietzsche, "Uses and Disadvantages," 76.

42. Nietzsche, "Uses and Disadvantages," 104.

43. Theo van Doesburg, "Antwoord aan Mejuffrouw Edith Pijpers en allen, die haar standpunt innemen" [Answer to Miss Edith Pijpers and everyone who takes her position], *De Stijl* 1, no. 6 (1918): 65. Nietzsche's critique against the life-rejecting nature of historical thought was voiced in similar terms by Hermann Muthesius in his widely read and important texts, *Style-Architecture*

"decadence" to give voice to the sense that the nineteenth century suffered from "an expression—and the masquerade—of a deep weakening, of weariness, of old age, of declining energies!"[44] The notion of decadence, however, represented more than the belief that the modern age was one of aesthetic and cultural decline. In addition, Nietzsche's concern with decadence lay in its underlying strategy of deception. As Matei Călinescu argued, "the spirit of decadence is *deceptive*, that is, [it] tries to pursue its destructive work under the most reassuring and healthy appearances. For Nietzsche, the strategy of decadence is typically that of the liar which deceives by *imitating* truth and by making his lies even more credible than truth itself. . . . Decadence is dangerous because it always disguises itself as its opposite."[45] It was this concern with imitation that led

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and Building Art [Stilarchitektur und Baukunst] (1902). Muthesius viewed the development of the nascent field of art history into an institutionalized scientific discipline as a principle source of the stylistic eclecticism that characterized the century. The increasingly influential art historian, Muthesius argued, replaced the artist as the main agent of cultural interpretation and production. Muthesius wrote, "The aestheticizing professor of art, a new type of the nineteenth century, took up his post and informed, examined, criticized, and systematized art. He was all the more powerful the weaker was the pulse of art, the more withered the natural life of art had become. Thus, the artist no longer ruled over the arts of the nineteenth century, but rather the professor of art did. No longer did the artist speak artistically to the public, but rather the specialist on art did; and the world no longer sought to enjoy art but rather to be instructed about it." Hermann Muthesius, *Style-Architecture and Building-Art: Transformations of Architecture in the Nineteenth Century and Its Present Condition*, trans. Stanford Anderson (Santa Monica, CA: Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities, 1994), 62.

Muthesius's concern for the depreciated position of the artist in the previous century was furthered in the Netherlands by the influential Dutch architect and theorist Hendrik Petrus Berlage. Berlage, who was well read in Nietzsche's writings, cited the above-mentioned quote by Muthesius directly, arguing that the academicism that afflicted nineteenth-century thought pushed architects into a "loveless" imitation of historical styles. As a result, Berlage lamented, "the notion has been lost that the external form of a work must be the consequence of something inside the creator." See Hendrik Petrus Berlage, "The Foundations and Development of Architecture: Four Lectures Delivered at the Kunstgewerbemuseum, Zurich (1908)," in *Hendrik Petrus Berlage: Thoughts on Style, 1886–1909*, trans. Iain Boyd Whyte and Wim de Wit (Santa Monica, CA: Getty Center for the History of Art and Humanities, 1996), 185–258.

44. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft* [The gay science], trans. Josefine Nauckhoff (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 241–42.

45. Matei Călinescu, *Five Faces of Modernity: Modernism, Avant-Garde, Decadence, Kitsch, Postmodernism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, second edition, 1987), 180.

Vilmos Huszar to invoke the term "decadence" in relation to the stagnation and decay brought about through the false application of a historical style to the present epoch.[46] Using the word *schijn* in Dutch to imply a misleading appearance, Van Doesburg explicitly rejected the "pseudo" characteristics of the past century: "*It is not our era which is falling apart, but it is just the past, the old culture, the pseudo-culture, which was founded on emotion, faith and nuance*; the past which produced an art with pseudo-light, pseudo-warmth (in painting this was warmth from three-quarters lapis lazuli, madder, umber, burnt sienna), pseudo-depth, pseudo-sublimity, pseudo-profundity, and pseudo-sensitivity, a culture which as a result ends in one big scaffold."[47] For both Nietzsche and the artists of De Stijl, the only solution to decadence was aesthetic, and to be found by the transcendent figure of the artist in the domain of the arts.[48]

Only the artist was the suitable agent through which the project of revivifying European society and culture could be enacted. As Nietzsche observed in *Human, All Too Human*, the artist is a "free spirit," one who "thinks differently from what, on the basis of his origin, environment, his class and profession, or on the basis of the dominant views of

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46. Vilmos Huszar, "Over de moderne toegepaste kunsten: Lezing gehouden door V. Huszar op het 2e Kongres van Moderne Kunst te Antwerpen 1922, 22 Januari" [On the modern applied arts: A lecture by Vilmos Huszár at the 2nd Congress of Modern Art in Antwerp, 22 January 1922], *Bowkundig Weekblad* 43, no. 8 (February 25, 1922): 59–69.

47."*Het is niet deze tijd die uiteenvalt, maar het is juist de oude tijd, de oude kultuur, de schijnkultuur, welke op emotie, geloof en nuance gegrondvest was;* de oude tijd, welke een kunst voorbarcht met schijnlicht, schijnwarmte (in de schilderkunst was deze warmte coor driekwat lapus lazuli, kraplak, omber, gebrande terra sienna) schijndiepte, schijnverhevenheid, schijninnigheid en schijngevoeligheid, een kultuur die als resultaat eindigt in één groot schavot." Van Doesburg, "Antwoord aan Mejuffrouw Edith Pijpers," 68. (Emphasis in the original.)

48."Our religion, morality, and philosophy are [decadent] forms of man. The *countermovement: art*." Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage Books, 1968), 419. (Emphasis in the original.)

the age, would have been expected of him."[49] It was the artist's task—not the historian's, nor, for that matter, the philosopher's or politician's—to lead the masses through the cultural tumult, elevating them in the process. "For when the artist no longer raises his public up," Nietzsche wrote, "it swiftly sinks downwards and it plunges the deeper and more perilously the higher a genius has borne it. . . ."[50] Van Doesburg emphasized this prophet-like image of the artist's cultural role, reiterating, "the new culture, which is still vague in the masses, comes towards clarity in a few, artists and thinkers. They bring it to logical expression."[51] The role of the artist as creator was, importantly, a destructive one. In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Nietzsche wrote: "And he who must be a creator of good and evil: truly, he must first be a destroyer and break values. . . . All suppressed truths become poisonous. And let everything break that is able to be broken by our truths! Many a house is still to be built!"[52] Nietzsche's calls for the artist as the principal arbiter of a transvaluation of values, coupled with his emphasis on the reaffirmation of life through productive forgetting, served as an important philosophical bridge to challenge the "European pseudoculture," which De Stijl perceived to have emerged from gap between the representation of the spirit of an age and the artist, the privileged arbiter of the form in which that age was to take shape.

For both Nietzsche and the members of De Stijl, it was the artist and the artist alone who could give form to culture through style. Nietzsche's notion of a "grand style,"

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49. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches: Ein Buch für freie Geister* [Human, all too human: A book for free spirits], trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 108.

50. Nietzsche, *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches*, 89.

51. "De nieuwe Kultuur, die nog vaag is in de massa, komt in enkelen, Kunstenaars en denkers, tot klaarheid." Theo van Doesburg, "Antwoord aan Mejuffrouw Edith Pijpers," 68.

one suitable to represent the demands of the modern age, could be found only through an artist's ability to "compel one's chaos to become form: to become logical, simple, unambiguous, mathematics, *law*. . . ."[53] Only a unified grand style could prove that foundation for a true culture, one that provided the aesthetic affirmation needed to satisfy the physical and psychological needs of the homeless transience of modern existence. Such a unified style expressed, as Hayden White summarized, "an art that is aware of its *metaphysical purpose*; for only art, not philosophy or science, can offer the metaphysical justification of life for man."[54] The universality of this stylistic unity expanded beyond a nationalistic setting. De Stijl's emphasis on the internationality of its aesthetic project closely parallels Nietzsche's call for those on the Continent to act as "good Europeans." In his concept of a unified pan-European culture, Nietzsche sought to challenge the rising tide of nationalism and xenophobia that was plaguing the continent at the end of the nineteenth century. Nietzsche's utopian vision rested on a universal language:

> To write better, however, means at the same time also to think better; continually to invent things more worth communicating and to be able actually to communicate them; to become translatable into the language of one's neighbor; to make ourselves accessible to the understanding of those foreigners who learn our language; to assist towards making all good things common property and freely available to the free-minded; finally, to *prepare the way* for that still distant state of things in which the good Europeans will come into possession of their great task: the direction and supervision of the total culture of the earth.[55]

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52. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book for All and None*, trans. by Clancy Martin (New York: Barnes & Noble Classics, 2005), 102.

53. Nietzsche, *Will to Power*, 444.

54. White, *Metahistory*, 343 (see n. 13 above). (Emphasis in the original.)

55. Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, 88. (Emphasis in the original.)

In similar terms, De Stijl viewed its new aesthetic project to be both transnational, abandoning all signifiers of the local, and apolitical. Van Doesburg stated this position in a Nietzschean tone in his essay, "Against Problem Art," in which he wrote: "The artist is neither proletarian nor bourgeois, and his creations belong neither to the proletarian class nor to the bourgeoisie. They belong to *everybody*. Art is an activity of the human spirit and is dedicated to the aim of liberating man from the chaos of life, from tragedy."[56] Rather, De Stijl's theoretical program of *nieuwe beelding* would serve as the unifying social, political, cultural, and philosophical model under which "modern man" should live. As the destruction of the First World War appeared to signal the peak of and death knell for the cultural confusion and degeneration of the past century, it was around Nietzschean thought that such core theoretical positions of De Stijl formed. Nietzsche's concepts of productive forgetting and destructive transvaluation of values, both of which were applied to the aesthetic realm of ornamentation, as well as his privileging of the "artist-philosopher" as the agent of change in the modern age, fundamentally guided De Stijl's engagement with the decorative arts.

Hegel, History, and Style: De Stijl's Use of Hegelian Thought

A fundamental paradox drove De Stijl's conception of and relationship to history; one it morphologically shared with modernity's own historical claims, and which separated the group from the antihistorical, ideological, or nihilistic positions of their avant-garde peers. While the artists of De Stijl claimed a radical break from past stylistic traditions,

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56. Theo van Doesburg, "Anti-Tendenzkunst (Een antwoord op den vraag: 'Moet de nieuwe kunst de massa dienen?')" [Against problem art: An answer to the question, "Must the new art serve the masses?], *De Stijl* 6, no. 2 (April 1923): 17–18. Repr. in *Theo van Doesburg,* trans. Joost Baljeu (New York: Macmillan, 1974), 135. (Emphasis in the original.)

they simultaneously relied heavily on the excavation of history in order to uncover a set of ontological principles for their aesthetic project that could provide a unitary style for the modern age equivalent to those of past epochs. Thus, De Stijl was fundamentally reliant on history, in spite of its profound philosophical misgivings regarding its limitations. Despite De Stijl's many claims to the contrary, history would play a decisive role in its world view, its aesthetic practices, and especially in its embrace of the decorative arts. To establish a historical precedent from which their theories on art and design could derive legitimacy, De Stijl members drew upon Hegel's ideas on history and aesthetics. Their introduction to Hegelian thought in the years preceding World War I coincided with a renewed interest in Hegel's philosophy of history, mediated in the Netherlands through the writings of the Leiden-based philosopher G. J. P. J. Bolland (1854–1922), who published his seminal Hegelian text, *Pure Reason and its Reality*, in 1912.[57] Hegel's *Aesthetics*, the posthumously published compilation of his lectures on the arts, was also well known and discussed by leading Dutch thinkers, such as Hendrik Petrus Berlage.[58] Among the artists of De Stijl, Theo van Doesburg was the most prolific in theorizing and mapping a historical precedent for De Stijl's aesthetic platform. Although it was Van Doesburg whose writings contained the most intricate formulation of Hegelian ideas, Huszar and Oud, as well as Mondrian, who included direct citations of

57. Gerard Bolland, *Zuiveere rede en hare wekelijkheid* [Pure reason and its reality] (Leiden: A. H. Adriant, 1912). It was through Bolland that both Mondrian and Van Doesburg were introduced to Hegel's most well-known principles. See Overy, *De Stijl*, 42 (see n. 2 above).

58. Berlage makes repeated reference to Hegel's thoughts throughout his writings in the years preceding the First World War, citing directly from Hegel's *Aesthetics* in his 1908 lecture, "The Foundations and Development of Architecture." See Berlage, "Foundations and Development of Architecture," 185 (see n. 43 above).

Hegel in his essay "The Nieuwe Beelding in Painting," all were directly engaging Hegelian thought during the First World War.[59]

Van Doesburg liberally appropriated Hegel's structure of history to aid in his own construction of a highly polemical historical narrative that would serve as the foundation of De Stijl theory. For example, Van Doesburg drew from the historical model established in Hegel's *Aesthetics*, in which the philosopher set forth his distinctive history of art by tracing the development of three historically determined forms of art. For Hegel, art represented a unique sphere of human production in which the Idea, as spirit, is brought into sensuous form.[60] Each stage in art's history reflected humanity's self-conscious relationship to this universal spirit during a given period.[61] Symbolic art, the first of the triad of art forms, encompassed ancient and non-Western cultures, which according to Hegel were in the initial stages of awareness of the spirit, and as a result were overwhelmed by the sublimity of their surrounding world.[62] Abstraction dominated symbolic art; which, Hegel argued, was limited by the discontinuity between form and spirit.[63] Classical art, the next stage in Hegel's history of aesthetics, coincided with the rise of ancient Greece, where true beauty reached a singular apotheosis in the form of

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59. Piet Mondrian, "De Nieuwe Beelding in de Schilderkunst: VI. De Redelijkheid der Nieuwe Beelding. (Vervolg.)" [The Nieuwe Beelding in painting: The rationality of the Nieuwe Beelding (continued)], *De Stijl* 1, no. 7 (May 1918): 73.

60. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art, Volume 1*, trans. T. M. Knox (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), 89.

61. "These forms find their origin in the different ways of grasping the Idea as content, whereby a difference in the configuration in which the Idea appears is conditioned." See Hegel, *Aesthetics*, 75.

62. Hegel, *Aesthetics*, 76–77.

63. Hegel writes, "On the other hand, the abstractness of this relation brings home to consciousness even so the foreignness of the Idea to natural phenomena, and the Idea, which has no other reality to express it, launches out in all these shapes, seeks itself in them in their unrest and extravagance, but yet does not find them adequate to itself." Hegel, *Aesthetics*, 77.

sculpture. The Greeks, Hegel maintained, achieved the perfect unity between the spirit, as the objective essence of the divine personified by the Greek pantheon of gods, and form, in the subjectivity of the human body depicted.[64] The decline of classical art was ushered in through what Hegel viewed as the imitative and satirical nature of Roman art. The final stage of artistic development, Romantic art, emerged with the rise of Christianity and its conception of an omniscient god. With it, Stephen Bungay writes, "form and content part company once more, but in this case because the content is fully determinate and is determined as inimical to sensuous manifestation. . . . The content is determinate, but its determinacy is not exhausted by its form; the signified is richer than the signifier, and thus alien to its form."[65] As a result, under the Christian tradition and its world view—which, for Hegel, remained dominant until the early nineteenth century—the spirit retreated into an "inwardness of self-consciousness" which could no longer be truly represented in form, and remained abstractly beyond the realm of art.[66]

Inspired by his deep interest in Hegel, Van Doesburg adopted a similar triadic structure for his construction of art's historical development in his 1920 book *Klassiek—Barok—Moderne*. In this text, he outlined the three categories that have characterized artistic production over time, writing:

> 1. The essence of classical art rests on the balanced relationship of essence and phenomena, or said differently: the balanced relationship of the universal and the particular. This balanced relationship or harmony in classical art came to expression through natural forms, thus entirely in the manner of nature.

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64. Hegel, *Aesthetics*, 78.

65. Stephen Bungay, *Beauty and Truth: A Study of Hegel's Aesthetics* (London: Oxford University Press, 1984), 57.

66. Hegel, *Aesthetics*, 80.

> 2. The essence of the baroque [rests] on an unbalanced relationship through the dominance of the particular, which in baroque art came to expression through the dominance of the capricious-natural forms and through the arbitrary exaggeration of them.
>
> 3. The essence of modern art rests on the balanced relationship of the universal and the particular. The balanced relationship in modern art comes to expression through abstract forms and colors, entirely in the manner of art.[67]

While Van Doesburg's critical history of art retained morphological similarities to Hegel's understanding of art as the sensuous manifestation of the relationship between form and spirit, he departed from Hegel in how his categories unfold diachronically. He did not view them as temporal markers; rather, they functioned far more qualitatively, establishing a set of aesthetic values with which differing epochs could be evaluated.[68] The category of classical art, for example, could be applied to both the art of ancient Greece and that of the Medieval period, for in each a harmonious relationship was established between the universal—expressed through religion—and the particular or figurative form. Meanwhile, the baroque expressed the dissolution of this harmony through an overdependence on imitation and emphasis on appearance. Van Doesburg considered the art of both ancient Rome and the Renaissance to exhibit the traits of the

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67. "1. Het wezen der klassieke kunst berust op evenwichtige verhouding van het wezen en de verschijnselen, of anders gezegd: op evenwichtige verhouding van het universele en het bizondere. Deze evenwichtige verhouding of harmonie, kwam in de klassieke kunst tot uitdrukking door natuurlijkevormen dus geheel op de wijze der natuur. 2. Het wezen van het barok op onevenwichtige verhouding door overheersching van het bizondere, heetgeen in de barok-kunst tot uitdrukking kwam door overheersching der grillig-natuurlijke vormen en door willekeurige overdrijving daarvan. 3. Het wezen der moderne kunst berust op evenwichtige verhouding van het universelle en het bizondere. De evenwichtige verhouding komt in de moderne kunst tot uiting door abstracte vormen en kleuren, geheel op de wijze der kunst." Theo van Doesburg, *Klassiek—Barok—Moderne* [Classic—Baroque—Modern] (Amsterdam, Em. Querido, 1920), 11–12.

68. Van Doesburg, *Klassiek—Barok—Moderne*, 12.

baroque, marking cyclical periods of dissolution between the universal and its expression in form that followed their classical precedents. For Van Doesburg, it was only with modern art that the cyclical pattern between classical and baroque conceptions of art could be broken, by transcending the limitations of the particular or figural form that restrained the expressive possibilities of classical art, through the movement toward abstraction.[69]

Underpinning Van Doesburg's categories of artistic production in *Klassiek—Barok—Moderne* was a series of polemical maneuverings that defended De Stijl's aesthetic project along historical lines. The first, and most explicit, was his critique of the spread of what he described as the "baroque plague" that was initiated by the Renaissance and that devolved over time into the stylistic eclecticism of the nineteenth century—and in the post-war years was exemplified by the Amsterdam School. For Van Doesburg, only the complete abstraction of modern art could "bring to an end the spirit-killing aping of rotten art products."[70] Secondly, Van Doesburg juxtaposed the modern with the classical, asserting that while both share in the balanced expression of the universal and the particular, the *Kunstidee* of classical art remains tethered to natural form. Modern art, however, would transcend the limitation of natural form by the harmonization of these two elements through the pure artistic form of abstraction.[71] Such a claim was significant. It asserted that modern, abstract art shared a quality—both in trait and value—with classical art. Van Doesburg's claims for modern art thus can be seen as undermining

69. Van Doesburg, *Klassiek—Barok—Moderne*, 12.

70. "En toch moest dit eens een einde nemen, deze geestdoodende naaperij van vermolmde kunstprodukten." Van Doesburg, *Klassiek—Barok—Moderne*, 20.

71. Van Doesburg, *Klassiek—Barok—Moderne*, 23.

Hegel's implication that classical art was the pinnacle of aesthetics, by superseding it through abstraction. Finally, in doing so, Van Doesburg makes clear that the Hegelian conception of the end of art was false, opening up a future utopian space which *nieuwe beelding* could occupy or inhabit.

Van Doesburg had established the framework for this argument in an earlier essay, "Thought–Vision–Creation," published in *De Stijl* in 1918. In this article, Van Doesburg crucially misread Hegel's hierarchical order of the expression of the absolute spirit. In his *Aesthetics,* Hegel had argued:

> Now, owing to its preoccupation with truth as the absolute object of consciousness, art too belongs to the absolute sphere of the spirit, and therefore, in its content, art stands on one and the same ground with religion (in the stricter sense of the word) and philosophy. . . . Owing to this sameness of content the three realms of absolute differ only in the *forms* in which they bring home to consciousness their object, the Absolute. . . . Now the first form [art] of this apprehension is an immediate and therefore sensuous knowing, a knowing, in the form and shape of the sensuous and objective itself, in which the Absolute is presented to contemplation and feeling. Then the second form [religion] is pictorial thinking, while the third and last [philosophy] is the free thinking of absolute spirit.[72]

Philosophy, according to Hegel's argument, was the most apt means to express the absolute spirit, particularly in a modern age where religious thought had been increasingly eroded by scientific rationalism, and as a result the "form of art [had] ceased to be the supreme need of the spirit."[73] Yet in "Thought–Vision–Creation," as Allan Doig has argued, Van Doesburg did not cede the decline or the end of art, or its secondary

72. Hegel, *Aesthetics*, 101.

position to philosophy, but rather asserted that art had only now, in the modern era, reached a status equivalent to philosophy's.[74] "Pure thought," Van Doesburg wrote, "which does not signify a concept derived from natural phenomena but which is contained in numbers, measures, relationships and abstract lines, is revealed conceptually (as Reason) by Chinese, Greek, and German philosophy and aesthetically by contemporary *nieuwe beelding*."[75]

To argue for his equivalence between modern art and philosophy, Van Doesburg altered Hegel's forms of thought discussed above. According to Van Doesburg, "concrete" thought registered as the lowest form of thought. It depended entirely on vision and manifested itself representationally and materially in "physio-plastic" art. This was followed by "deformed" thought, embodied in "ideo-plastic" art, by which he implied a greater role of conceptualization and abstraction, while still retaining a representational grounding. Finally, echoing Hegel's description of philosophical thought, Van Doesburg presents the highest form as "pure abstract thought," or "thought for thought's sake," which has recently manifested itself through the "plastic vision" of abstract art which expresses "a relationship of concepts."[76] Where Hegel argued that art would itself always remain limited in its representation of the absolute spirit by the conditions of its material and representational nature, Van Doesburg argued that the dematerialization of art through abstract form and color offered a viable path to the

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73. Hegel, *Aesthetics*, 103.

74. Doig, *Theo van Doesburg,* 6–7 (see chap. 1, n. 14).

75. Theo van Doesburg, "Thought–Vision–Creation," in *Theo van Doesburg*, trans. Joost Baljeu (New York: Macmillan, 1974), 109. (Originally published as "Denken—Aanschowen—Beelden," *De Stijl* 2, no. 2 [December 1918]: 23.)

76. Baljeu, *Theo van Doesburg,* 109.

expression of the absolute spirit in the modern age, an example of which was already becoming visible in the work of artists such as Wassily Kandinsky and Piet Mondrian.[77]

Van Doesburg's productive misreading of Hegel's hierarchy of expressive modes of the absolute spirit enabled him to position De Stijl as the transitional bridge to a modern episteme of "pure abstract thought," through which a unified style for the modern era could be conceived. Turning synchronically to the present, Van Doesburg acknowledged that all three categories of thought were visible in the stylistic heterogeneity of the past century. Van Doesburg's understanding of this eclecticism was rooted in his adaptation of the Hegelian dialectic, through which, he argued, "one may conclude that each new development contains the germ of decay, and moreover that all decay also contains the possibility of a new beginning. . . . Everything is in a state of continuous development."[78] Van Doesburg maintained that he himself was an example of this process, acknowledging that his own art had worked dialectically through each category of thought.

The modern age, Van Doesburg said, would not arrive in an epistemic rupture, but would emerge through a slow unfolding carried out by a select few. In his important lecture, "The Will to Style," rooted in an idiosyncratic merging of Hegelian and Nietzschean thought, Van Doesburg claimed, "the entire system of evolution is based upon an increasing spiritual profundity which causes the revaluation of all values."[79] This intertwining of philosophical paradigms allowed Van Doesburg to identify and refute the philosophical underpinnings of the stylistic eclecticism of the previous century, while

77. Doig, *Theo van Doesburg,* 11.
78. Baljeu, *Theo van Doesburg*, 117.

simultaneously creating a space through which De Stijl's project could garner aesthetic, historical, and philosophical grounding to support its abstract, totalizing project. In a word, Van Doesburg, and through him De Stijl in general, embraced a new form of historical understanding through which the consummate value—akin to Hegel's self-consciousness of spirit—was the realization of abstraction.

Conclusion

In her discussion of De Stijl's engagement with Hegelian philosophy, Annette Michelson expressed surprise at finding an early sound poem written by Van Doesburg, which reads as follows: "A- / aba- / ca ca- / ca, ca ca / ca da, / da, da,- / da." She wrote: "It is the founding father of De Stijl, the celebrant of the Dialectic, the Hierophant of the Absolute who has produced this text. . . . We seem to have wandered into a pan-European nursery, resonant with an infantile demotic that inscribes within the empyrean of Hegelian onto-aesthetics the discourse of a primitive anal eroticism. . . . How does this come to be, and what can it signify?"[80] In an effort to explain this perceived paradox, Michelson undertook a psychoanalytic reading of the splitting of De Stijl between an embrace of an eschatological drive towards the purity of abstraction and a scatological deconstruction of language through Dadaist poetry—best exemplified by Van Doesburg and his adopted Dada alias, I. K. Bonset. Yet in viewing this apparently irreconcilable divide in the group's practice as stemming from entirely discordant motivations, a fundamental unity of De Stijl ideology was overlooked.

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79. Baljeu, *Theo van Doesburg*, 117.

80. The poem was written by Van Doesburg in 1915 to his friend the poet Antony Kok, while the former was stationed as a soldier near the Dutch border. Anette Michelson, "De Stijl, Its Other

As I have tried to demonstrate in this chapter, such an understanding can be illuminated by looking at De Stijl's philosophical constructions through the lens of the decorative arts. By acknowledging the group's engagement with a discursive tradition that probed the cultural and historical significance of style in the decorative arts, De Stijl can be firmly contextualized within a broader project to reconcile the stylistic eclecticism identified as the root of nineteenth-century decadence and cultural decline. This "crisis of style" was a problem fundamentally epistemological in nature, and De Stijl, with Van Doesburg in its lead, drew upon philosophers such as Hegel and Nietzsche who sought to fundamentally define its causes and effects. Nietzschean thought enabled the group to construct a commitment to the transcendent capacity of the present through a constructive process of forgetting which opened the future to new possibilities. In negotiating such a creation, however, Van Doesburg marshaled idiosyncratic misreadings of Hegelian philosophy, in order to situate the utopian project within a pantheon of epochal styles, universal in nature and timeless in their morality. Understanding these crucial ideas underpinning De Stijl theory elucidates the singular origin that motivated the group's apparently paradoxical support for continuity and destruction.

Face: Abstraction and Cacaphony, or What Was the Matter with Hegel?," *October* 22 (Autumn 1982): 22.

3 A Historiographic Anachronism: De Stijl and the Decorative Arts

In 1925, in his *Principles of Neo-Plastic Art*, Theo van Doesburg reproduced four images depicting the systematic visual deconstruction of a figurative image (fig. 3.1).[1] Working from a photographic reproduction of a cow, Van Doesburg illustrated his gradual and seemingly logical process of visual reduction from figuration to a final, distilled abstract image of simple geometric forms. A common practice, particularly in his early theoretical writings, Van Doesburg's pedagogical illustration emerged as a manifesto of De Stijl's aesthetic practice and aims.[2] A decade after its publication, Alfred Barr included Van Doesburg's illustration in his foundational text *Cubism and Abstract Art* (1936), cementing its position within the canon of art-historical modernism.[3] The illustration's value to Barr lay in its dual role as both a diagram of the teleological development of the fine arts—particularly in the medium of painting—from figuration to complete abstraction; while also functioning self-reflexively, identifying and affirming De Stijl's position within the historical progress of art towards modernism. Barr's representation of

1. The book was the sixth in the series of *Bauhausbücher*, published through the Bauhaus. Theo van Doesburg, *Grundbegriffe der neuen gestaltenden Kunst* (Munich: Albert Langen, 1925).

2. The abstract compositions used for the book were likely completed in 1918. Between 1918 and 1919, Van Doesburg produced two additional pedagogical diagrams illustrating the stages of visual deconstruction towards abstraction. See for example Theo van Doesburg, *Drie voordrachten over de nieuwe beeldende kunst: Haar ontwikkeling, aesthetische beginselen en toekomstigen stijl* [Three lectures on the new plastic art: Its development, aesthetic principles, and future style] (Amsterdam: Maatschappij voor Goede en Goedkoope Lectuur, 1919), 93; as well as Theo van Doesburg, "Van 'natuur' tot 'komposities': Aanteekeningen bij de ontwikkeling van een abstracte schilderij" [From 'nature' to 'composition': Notes on the development of an abstract painting], *De Hollandsche Revue* 8 (August 1919): 473–75.

3. Alfred Barr, *Cubism and Abstract Art* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1936), 144.

De Stijl equated its historical value within the modernist canon with its pursuit of abstraction and modernist autonomy.

The consequence of Barr's formalist concerns with abstraction for the subsequent historiography of De Stijl led to a narrowing of focus by art historians on recovering the aesthetic and intellectual sources of the group's abstract visual language, in a "quest for euchronistic consonance" in order to explicate their aesthetic project.[4] To accomplish such a task, they tended to reduce the complexity of De Stijl theory, representing the group's theoretical positions as an idealized, concentrated set of principles, frequently derived predominantly from the writing of Piet Mondrian.[5] Following the Second World War and building on the foundation laid by Barr, in his early reconstruction of an intellectual history of De Stijl, the Dutch art historian Hans Jaffé reinforced this association between Mondrian's theory of *nieuwe beelding* and the group's entire theoretical platform.[6] While necessary to any understanding of the formation and development of De Stijl's art and theory in the years during and immediately after World

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4. Georges Didi-Huberman, "Before the Image, Before Time: The Sovereignty of Anachronism," trans. Peter Mason, in *Compelling Visuality: The Work of Art In and Out of History*, ed. Claire Farago and Robert Zwijnenberg (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 35.

5. Mondrian's aesthetic and theoretical platform has long been conflated with De Stijl as a whole, even during the time of the journal's publication. This was in part the result of the circulation of Mondrian's two major early treatises, "De nieuwe beelding in de schilderkunst" [The new plastic in painting] and *Le Nêo-Plasticisme: Principe général de l'équivalence plastique* [Neo-Plasticism: The general principle of plastic equivalence]. The former was published in twelve installments in the first volume of *De Stijl* from November 1917 to December 1918. The latter was a pamphlet that accompanied Mondrian's first exhibition at Léonce Rosenberg's *Galerie l'Effort Moderne* in 1921.

6. Hans Jaffé, "De Stijl's Philosophical Origins," in *De Stijl*, 52–63 (see chap. 1, n. 1). This history of thought was canonized during the late 1980s and 1990s through largely formalist studies of the group by Kermit Champa, Yve-Alain Bois, Mark Cheetham, and Carel Blotkamp. See Kermit Champa, *Mondrian Studies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984); Yve-Alain Bois, "The Iconoclast," in *Piet Mondrian: 1872–1944*, ed. Yve-Alain Bois and Joop Joosten (Boston: Bullfinch, 1995), 313–72; Mark Cheetham, *The Rhetoric of Purity: Essentialist Theory*

War I, these theoretical treatises and their immediate sources have commanded the attention of scholars because of the disproportionate value they gave to abstraction within the historiography of modernism. With few exceptions, this fixation on models of autonomy as the crux of modernist art has pushed these intellectual sources to the foreground of art historical study in the "search for strategies of motivation," as De Stijl moved beyond the lingering thresholds of cubist abstraction into the equivocal realm of signification brought about by nonfiguration.[7] Yet as Michael White has argued, such constructions of De Stijl's place within modernism are built on idealist positions that continue to privilege painting, and theorize the group's artistic production as culturally autonomous or representative of a structuralist system.[8] The end result has been that a number of histories of social, aesthetic, and political thought, as well as the decorative objects and designs by the group that embodied them, have been overlooked or entirely occluded from the study of De Stijl because of their anachronistic position relative to these dominant historiographic forces.

Moving beyond such constraints, I seek to mobilize Georges Didi-Huberman's notion of the "anachronism," in order to examine productively and innovatively the richly heterogeneous histories of thought that were most emphatically and creatively manifested within the forms that De Stijl's formative decorative projects took. It was this very heterogeneity which pushed these early projects to the margins of the study of De Stijl.

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and the Advent of Abstract Painting (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); and Carel Blotkamp, *Mondrian: The Art of Destruction* (London: Reaktion Books, 1994).

7. Yve-Alain Bois, "The De Stijl Idea" and "Strzemiński and Kobro: In Search of Motivation," in *Painting as Model,* 101–22; 123–56 (see chap. 1, n. 29).

8. Michael White, "Introduction: Who's Afraid of Red, Yellow and Blue?" in *De Stijl and Dutch Modernism*, 1–11 (see chap. 1, n. 25).

Understanding De Stijl in such terms enables the group to become an object of art history that is, as Didi-Huberman argued,

> an object of complex, impure temporality: an *extraordinary montage of heterogeneous times forming anachronisms.* In the dynamic and complexity of this montage, historical notions as fundamental as those of "style" or "epoch" suddenly take on a dangerous plasticity (dangerous only for those who would like everything to be in its place once and for all in the same epoch: the fairly common figure of what I shall call the "historian with time phobia").[9]

Conceiving of De Stijl within the framework of such a historiographical approach, then, demands a certain comfort with and acceptance of competing, and at times paradoxical, histories of thought that stretch beyond the years immediately before, during, and following World War I.

This flexibility is necessary because these artists seldom carefully or systematically read the original texts they cited: more often than not, their knowledge of a topic came through secondary discussions in Dutch, German, British, and French journals, or through correspondence with other artists and critics who were likewise only superficially aware of such texts. Moreover, De Stijl artists appropriated, productively misread, or intentionally reinterpreted ideas to conform to the shape of their own utopian visions of art's future development. Furthermore, all of the ideas espoused by these artists, intellectuals, philosophers, and cultural theorists were either directly engaged with or were inflected by the polemics surrounding the decorative arts. As I shall argue, it is the decorative arts—anachronistic from the modernist perspective, yet arguably *the* lightning rod for many of modernity's principal issues since the mid-eighteenth

9. Didi-Huberman, "Before the Image," 38.

century—and the discursive histories carried within their tradition which are best suited to engage faithfully and critically the De Stijl group's own ideological posture and aesthetic actions. By reconstructing the rich matrix of ideas that span the *longue durée* of modernity's rise, I will seek to add to and complicate the heterogeneous temporalities of thought that coalesced into form in De Stijl's projects in the decorative arts. My intention in what follows is not to adduce every significant influence on De Stijl's conception of history, moral purpose, and the redemptive authority of decorative objects. Rather, I have concentrated on those figures, mostly architects-cum-theorists engaged with the decorative arts and aesthetics, whose writings exerted a profound and decisive influence on the principal representatives of De Stijl.

De Stijl/Der Stil: Gottfried Semper and the Principle of *Bekleidung*

Van Doesburg's decision to title his newly founded journal *De Stijl* was both historicizing and polemical: an immediate allusion to historical debates, particularly those of the nineteenth century, concerning the nature, morality, and significance of the decorative arts. Specifically, Van Doesburg made direct reference to the German architect and theorist Gottfried Semper's unfinished treatise, *Style in the Technical and Tectonic Arts; or, Practical Aesthetics* (1860–63).[10] Semper's theories on the decorative arts and architecture were well known in the Netherlands, and found particular support

10. The full title of the two volumes of Semper's text was *Der Stil in den technischen und tektonischen Künsten; oder; Praktische Aesthetik: Ein Handbuch für Techniker, Künstler und Kunstfreunde*.

through the Dutch architect Hendrik Petrus Berlage.[11] Berlage became aware of Semper's ideas during his studies in architecture at the Federal Institute of Technology (Eidgenössisches Technisches Polytechnikum) in Zurich, where Semper had taught earlier.[12] Berlage condensed and incorporated many of Semper's central theories on architecture, art history, and the decorative arts in his own writings, notably in his 1904 book *Concerning Style in Architecture and Furniture Design*, which was heavily indebted to Semper's *Der Stil*. Berlage's book, and subsequently Semper's theories, were well known to the artists of De Stijl. They viewed Semper as a foundational nineteenth-century figure in the development of a style for the modern age.[13] Several of Semper's principal concepts underpinned De Stijl's core theoretical ideas: most notably in the group's pursuit of an ontology of the arts, as well as in its antifunctionalist approach in its decorative and architectural projects.

Semper's theories on style, architecture, and the decorative arts took clearer form in the wake of the 1851 Great Exhibition in London. Semper had fled into exile in Great Britain in 1850, after taking part in the Dresden uprising, alongside Republican counterparts such as Richard Wagner (1813–83).[14] For Semper, and the generation of aesthetic and cultural theorists writing in the years following the continental unrest of 1848, the Great Exhibition focused contemporary social and economic anxieties directly

11. Auk van der Woude, *The Art of Building: From Classicism to Modernity; The Dutch Architectural Debate 1840–1900,* trans. Yvette Blankvoort and Bard Janssen (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2001), 51–52.

12. Whyte and De Wit, *Hendrik Petrus Berlage*, 4–5 (see chap. 1, n. 43). Berlage received initial training as a painter at the National Academy of Visual Arts (Rijksakademie van Beeldende Kunsten) before departing to Switzerland to complete his studies.

13. White, *De Stijl and Dutch Modernism*, 8.

upon the objects on display and the decoration that adorned them.[15] Under this spectacle of commodities accumulated for the Great Exhibition, the visible connection between an object's appearance and the nature and time of its production became disrupted. As Alina Payne observed, once such products entered this microcosm of a capitalist market, it became "notoriously difficult to figure out how, when or where they were made."[16] This was compounded by the emergence of novel methods of industrial mass production, which became inseparably tied to this unmooring of commodity goods from a clear system of signs which communicated their cultural, temporal, and material value. The decorative arts became a fulcrum for these concerns, as they themselves functioned as paradigms of the relationship between appearance (ornament) and form (object). Machines had become essential to the production of decorative objects, in order to feed the demands of a burgeoning petit-bourgeois class and an expanding global market. In order to inexpensively reproduce the effects of handcraftsmanship, traditional techniques and expensive materials were replaced by cost-effective methods such as the innovative use of molds and imitative metallic platings. "As a result," Nancy Troy has also noted, "it became difficult for the average person to distinguish between antique objects fashioned almost entirely by hand and modern ones made with the substantial aid of machines since the style of both might well be exactly the same."[17]

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14. Semper was reportedly referred to the defense committee by Richard Wagner, to advise on barricade design. See Wolfgang Herrmann, *Gottfried Semper: In Search of Architecture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1984), 8–10.

15. Alina Payne, *From Ornament to Object: Genealogies of Architectural Modernism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 68.

16. Payne, *Ornament to Object*, 4.

17. Troy, *Modernism and the Decorative Arts*, 8 (see chap. 1, n. 20).

At the Great Exhibition, style became simulacrum amid the confusion of industrial processes. Semper addressed these concerns directly in a review of the Great Exhibition published in 1852:

> The hardest porphyry and granite are cut like chalk and polished like wax. Ivory is softened and pressed into forms. Rubber and gutta-percha are vulcanized and utilized in a thousand imitations of wood, metal, and stone carvings, exceeding by far the natural limitations of the material they purport to represent. . . . Machines sew, knit, embroider, paint, carve, and encroach deeply into the field of human art, putting to shame every human skill.[18]

To Semper, the equivocal nature of modern ornament and the material quality of the decorative arts under mass production were pernicious developments. The German architect had long understood the decorative arts as the principal index of cultural health, and as a result he viewed the Great Exhibition as the clearest sign of a "phenomenon of artistic decline."[19] Semper sought a solution to this decline not through an abstract theorization of beauty or technical manual of styles; rather, he desired to present an "empirical theory of art (theory of style)" that would examine the anthropological, material, and technical preconditions of style.[20] Semper asserted that the contemporary crisis in style resulted, as Deborah Schafter observed, because "ornament had lost its

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18. Gottfried Semper, "Science, Industry, and Art," in *Gottfried Semper: The Four Elements of Architecture and Other Writings*, trans. Henry Francis Mallgrave and Wolfgang Herrmann (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 134. (Originally published as *Wissenschaft, Industrie und Kunst: Vorschläge zur Anregung nationalen Kunstgefühls* [Braunschweig: Friedrich Vieweg und Sohn, 1852].)

19. Payne, *Ornament to Object*, 64.

20. Harry Francis Mallgrave, "Introduction," in *Gottfried Semper: Style in the Technical and Tectonic Arts; or, Practical Aesthetics*, trans. Harry Francis Mallgrave and Michael Robinson (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2004), 18.

symbolic reference to the primary functions—technical and ritual—of structural elements."[21]

Semper's ontological examination of the decorative arts and architecture in the modern age assumed a particularly anthropological nature. In a provocative thesis put forward first in the book *Four Elements of Architecture* (1851), and expanded upon more thoroughly in *Der Stil*, he turned to "the primitive conditions (Urzustände) of human society" to assert that the monumental art of architecture had evolved its principal forms and functional meanings in tandem with four basic types of decorative arts.[22] Around the four elements of the primitive dwelling—the hearth, roof, mound or foundation, and enclosure or wall—a distinct decorative art developed: ". . . *ceramics* and afterwards metal works around the *hearth*, *water* and *masonry works* around the *mound*, *carpentry* around the *roof* and its accessories. But what primitive technique evolved from the *enclosure*? None other than the art of the *wall fitter* [*Wandbereiter*], that is, the weaver of mats and carpets."[23] For Semper, the history of art was the evolutionary development of these four forms as they responded to differing materials and environmental conditions.

In making such claims, the architect established the decorative arts as the root source of modern architectural form. The consequences were threefold. First, in Semper's historical study of stylistic development the architect shifted the terms of his analysis, from style as form to style as the result of material processes. Second, in conceiving the decorative arts as *Urformen*, Semper elevated these practices—left out of traditional

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21. Deborah Schafter, *The Order of Ornament, the Structure of Style: Theoretical Foundations of Modern Art and Architecture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 32.

22. Gottfried Semper, "The Four Elements of Architecture: A Contribution to the Comparative Study of Architecture," in Mallgrave and Robinson, *Gottfried Semper*, 102.

hierarchies of the arts from Leon Albertti Batista to Hegel—to a new aesthetic prominence. As Payne observed: "In one single move Semper had apparently denied centuries of efforts on the artists' part to align their work with that of poets and philosophers and allow [crafts] entry into the rarified Olympian world of the mind."[24] Finally, his theories offered a way to reconsider the nature of architecture, setting out an inherent link between the small-scale, utilitarian object and the monumental aesthetic environment. In doing so, Semper asserted the social and aesthetic primacy of all those fields previously characterized as "decorative."

Yet of all Semper's theoretical positions, it was his concept of *Bekleidung*, or "dressing," that set the most significant theoretical precedent for De Stijl's understanding of the built environment and the decorative application of color within it. Semper's idea of *Bekleidung* developed over the course of his theoretical writings, culminating in the first volume of *Der Stil* that was dedicated specifically to textiles. There Semper argued, contrary to the view held since Vitruvius, that the origins of architectural structure were not to be found in the load-bearing posts of the primitive hut, from which the evolution of architecture was traced through the stone columns of ancient Greece to present architectural forms. Rather, according to Semper, architecture's beginnings lay in prehistoric woven enclosures in which the interior, and importantly the spaces within it, were delimited by barriers of wickerwork or textile.[25] Semper saw philological evidence of this in the Germanic languages, in the link between the words for "wall" (*Wand*) and

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23. Semper, "*Four Elements*," 103.
24. Payne, *Ornament to Object,* 35.
25. Semper, *Der Stil*, 247–48.

"garment" (*Gewand*).[26] With the principle of *Bekleidung*, Semper was able to make a radical leap, linking his understanding of textiles as an *Urform* with his archeological research in, and support of, the presence of polychromy in ancient Greek art.[27] He acknowledged that as architecture evolved and the need for greater structural support increased, these woven barriers had evolved into stone, brick, and other hardened materials. Yet, Semper argued, "even where building solid walls became necessary, the latter were only the inner, invisible structure hidden behind the true and legitimate representatives of the wall, the colorful woven carpets."[28] Drawing upon the work of German archeologist Karl Bötticher (1806–89), Semper conceived of the wall in dualistic terms: a core form (*Kernform*), comprising the material and functional nature of the wall; and the artistic form (*Kunstform*), consisting of the outer surface covering the *Kernform*.[29] According to Semper, the dematerialization of the wall's *Kernform* through the application of "dressing materials," such as stucco, and their decoration through polychromy were the lingering architectural trace of the original use of colorful textile partitions in prehistoric structures. Semper elaborated that these dressing materials were nevertheless "freed of material service; it appeared only as a carrier of the formal idea, while at the same time emancipating the latter from the building material by hiding the joints in the stone. Thus, form is explained only in terms of itself and by the organic idea

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26. Semper, *Der Stil*, 248.

27. It was his polemical defense of polychromy in ancient Greek sculpture and architecture in his essay, "Preliminary Remarks on Polychromy Architecture and Sculpture in Antiquity," published in 1834, that first brought the young Semper notoriety. See Harry Francis Mallgrave, *Gottfried Semper: Architect of the Nineteenth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 25–37.

28. Semper, "Four Elements," 104.

29. Payne, *Object to Ornament,* 38. For a comprehensive analysis of Semper's relationship to Bötticher's thoughts, see Herrmann, *Gottfried Semper*, 139–52.

contained within it. . . .”[30] For Semper, it was only with the use of porous marble, capable of absorbing color directly, that Greek architecture came to a unification of *Kernform* with *Kunstform*.

In his rethinking of architecture’s history and development, Semper addressed a number of topics concerning the built environment—from the origins and nature of ornament and support to the articulation of interior space—that would become the focus of intense debate during the opening years of the twentieth century. De Stijl’s engagement with this tradition of Semperian thought provided an important foundation around which they could conceive two key elements of their theoretical project. First, Semper’s uncovering of a relationship between the decorative object and the monumental building provided a framework for De Stijl to establish a set of ontological principles that would extend to all media of art and unify them under a single aesthetic. The expansive possibilities of De Stijl’s geometric visual language and chromatic specificity were crucial in this regard. Second, while De Stijl members largely ignored the materialism of Semper’s ideas, they embraced the dematerializing nature of his concept of *Bekleidung* which enabled such an expansive unity to be conceived. The theoretical significance of color and its application to the surfaces of decorative objects and architecture within the De Stijl platform lay in its ability to neutralize the material and divisional barriers between differing media. In fact, this chromatic dematerialization was *the* essential formal principle that enabled the articulation and integration of all arts into an aesthetically unified *Gesamtkunstwerk*.

30. Semper, *Der Stil*, 379.

Metaphors of Gothic: Ruskin, Morris, and Ethics in the Decorative Arts

Among the pantheon of historical styles, De Stijl's history of art bestowed an elevated status on the Gothic period. In *Klassiek–Barok–Moderne*, for example, Van Doesburg praised the medieval art of Northern Europe for—along with possessing a higher spiritual nature—being driven by a "moral consciousness."[31] It was in Gothic art in general, and architecture in particular, that Van Doesburg found an important allegorical model to express De Stijl's aim to transcend mere aesthetic concerns through a style built upon a moral imperative.

This moral exigency was acutely felt by the artists of De Stijl during and in the wake of the destruction of World War I. In these years, they embraced many of the underlying ideals of Gothic espoused by one of the most influential theorists of the Gothic Revival, John Ruskin, as well as his follower William Morris (1834–1896). Although De Stijl members, such as J. J. P. Oud, would come vehemently to reject certain aspects of Ruskin's and Morris's principles, the group's fundamental understanding of the built environment as ethical in nature derived in significant measure from the writings of these two prominent nineteenth-century figures.[32]

Ruskin turned to Gothic architecture as the paragon of social and spiritual revitalization. He was responding to what he perceived as London's aesthetic and moral deterioration following the unprecedented physical changes in the city brought on by the rapid development of industrialized methods of production and construction during the

31. Van Doesburg, *Klassiek—Barok—Moderne*, 17–18 (see chap. 1, n. 67).

Victorian Era. His use of Gothic as a stylistic model for the reimagination of industrializing urban centers followed a tradition that had existed since Romanticism at end of the eighteenth century, a notable example being Goethe's reflections on the Strasbourg Cathedral.[33] Such a position had already been staked out by Ruskin's immediate predecessor Augustus Welby Northmore Pugin, who sought in the Gothic style an aesthetic foundation for the formation of a new Christian society, in response to the perceived "paganism" of the then-current trend of neoclassicism.[34] A devout Catholic, Pugin's advocacy of the Gothic style was premised mostly on the nostalgic return to and imitation of religious architecture from the medieval period. Distancing his theories of Gothic from the largely aesthetic interests of the Romantics and Pugin's staunch Catholicism, Ruskin embraced Gothic as an explicit secular response to the negative social, cultural, and aesthetic effects of industrialization on the present, modern built environment. Because he saw a direct connection between the moral corruption of society and the degradation of architectural form, the social nature of architecture took on central importance for Ruskin's project. As Adrian Forty has noted, Ruskin's originality lay in his assertion that "architecture was the embodiment of work, and the extent to which it

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32. See for example J. J. P. Oud, "Art and Machine," in *De Stijl,* trans. and ed. Hans Jaffé (London: Thames and Hudson, 1970), 97. (Originally published as "Kunst en Machine," *De Stijl* 1, no. 3 [January 1918]: 26.)

33. Goethe published his thoughts on the Strasbourg Cathedral in particular, and Gothic architecture in general, in his essay "Von deutsche Baukunst" [On German architecture] in 1772. For further discussion of the Romantic origins of the Gothic, see David Spurr, *Architecture and Modern Literature* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2012), 103–5.

34. Pugin concluded his 1841 text, *Principles of Pointed or Christian Architecture*, by stating the aim of the Gothic style: "Let then the Beautiful and the True be our watchword for future exertions in the overthrow of modern paltry taste and paganism, and the revival of Catholic art and dignity." Pugin, *Principles of Pointed or Christian Architecture* (Edinburgh: J. Grant, 1895), 56. For further discussion of Pugin's theories, see Michael Bright, "A Reconsideration of A. W. N. Pugin's Architectural Theories," *Victorian Studies* 22, no. 2 (Winter 1979): 151–72.

expressed the vitality and freedom of those who had built it was the measure of its social quality."[35]

By shifting the terms in which the social nature of art was understood—from appearance to production—Ruskin provided a pointed polemic through which to construct his apology for the Gothic style, the most widely known instance of which was his chapter "The Nature of Gothic," in the second volume of his treatise *The Stones of Venice* (1851–53). Here he described the effect of industrial mass production upon aesthetic taste in his native England, particularly in the popular demand for precision and regularity. Ruskin identified this desire for exactitude in two dominant architectural trends permeating contemporary London. The first was the popular obsession with neoclassicism. In this context, he argued that the geometric precision of neoclassical design was morally corrupt, as its form was modeled on an aesthetic derived from an oppressive system of slave labor in the ancient world.[36] The second trend was the proliferation of iron and glass construction based upon techniques of prefabrication and modular construction, in which Ruskin saw a dehumanizing reliance on standardization. Writing *The Stones of Venice* during the construction of Joseph Paxton's (1805–63) Crystal Palace (1851), Ruskin connected this movement in modern architecture to the emerging phenomenon of alienated labor. Indeed, he equated the rise of machine production with the debasement of moral civilization, observing:

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35. Adrian Forty, *Words and Buildings: A Vocabulary of Modern Architecture* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 2000), 104. Forty points to Friedrich Schiller's *Über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen in einer Reihe von Briefen* [Letters on the aesthetic education of man] (1795) as a source of Ruskin's doctrine of "the value of the appearance of labor upon architecture."

36. Alf Boe, *From Gothic Revival to Functional Form: A Study of Victorian Theories of Design* (Oslo: Scandinavian University Press, 1997), 90.

> We have much studied and much perfected, of late, the great civilized invention of the division of labor; only we give it a false name. It is not, truly speaking, the labor that is divided; but the men;—divided into mere segments of men—broken into small fragments and crumbs of life; so that all the little piece of intelligence that is left in a man is not enough to make a pin, or a nail, but exhausts itself in making the point of a pin or the head of a nail.[37]

For Ruskin, the division of labor brought on by machine production under emergent capitalist markets led to the degradation of human labor, as well as of beauty and truth, which he had identified as among the ideational "lamps" lighting the way to moral fulfilment and meaning.[38]

Ruskin presented the medieval period as a model with which to counter these conditions not merely aesthetically, but socially as well. He contended, "in the Mediaeval, or especially Christian, system of ornament, this slavery is done away with altogether; Christianity having recognized, in small things as well as great, the individuality of every soul."[39] He argued further, "Now it is only by labor that thought can be made healthy, and only by thought that labor can be made happy, and the two cannot be separated with impunity. It would be well if all of us were good handicraftsmen in some kind, and the dishonor of manual labor done away with altogether. . . ."[40] According to Ruskin, the medieval period marked a moment in which the artisan, freed from the restrictions of precision and its enslaving hold over his labor, engaged fully in handcraftsmanship. He argued that only in handcraftsmanship could the identity of the

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37. John Ruskin, *The Stones of Venice, volume 2* (2nd ed., London: Smith, Elder, 1867), 165.

38. See John Ruskin, *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*, in *The Works of John Ruskin*, ed. E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn (New York: Longmans, Green, 1903).

39. Ruskin, *The Stones of Venice*, 159.

40. Ruskin *The Stones of Venice*, 169.

artisan and his labor remain indexically: carried into his work by the subtle variations of carved stone or gilded flourish. The beauty of Gothic architecture emerged as a result of the power of this free labor unified in a communal effort. For Ruskin, the Gothic cathedral stood as the consummate encouragement to return to a premodern, cooperative model of labor, which upheld the unification of labor and production as the center of a healthy communal spirit.

Although Marxian in tone, Ruskin's positions, as John Matteson noted, were driven by humanistic concerns rather than those of economics.[41] It was William Morris who forwarded many of Ruskin's ideas to a new generation of artists and aesthetics theorists, by bringing to them a more ardent commitment to the politics of socialism. Like Ruskin, Morris rejected the wave of mass-produced decorative arts flooding English markets and the machine-manufactured ornamental facades adorning many of the country's newest buildings. Morris detested the "commercial shams" produced by manufacturers under the dictates of efficiency, and he considered any machine production that limited the role of the worker as "altogether an evil."[42] For Morris, the guild system best exemplified the model of labor upon which modern labor organizations should be based. He rejected Ruskin's belief that an aristocratic class was necessary to maintain social harmony, instead viewing the spirit of Gothic as embodied in a socialist communal structure capable of resolving the discordant living standards between classes.[43] In his

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41. John Matteson, "Constructing Ethics and the Ethics of Construction: John Ruskin and the Humanity of the Builder," *CrossCurrents* 52, no. 3 (Fall 2002): 297.

42. Morris did make an exception for machine production if it was used to reduce the drudgery of manual labor. See Boe, *From Gothic Revival to Functional Form*, 107.

43. Ruskin wrote, ". . . so that though there should still be a trenchant distinction of race between nobles and commoners, there should not, among the latter be trenchant distinction of

lecture "Gothic Architecture," given in London in 1889, Morris emphasized the protosocialist underpinnings of the Gothic period:

> The full measure of this freedom Gothic Architecture did not gain until it was in the hands of the workmen of Europe, the guildsmen of the Free Cities, who on many a bloody field proved how dearly they valued their corporate life by the generous valor with which they risked their lives in its defense. But from the first, the tendency was towards this freedom of hand and mind subordinated to the co-operative harmony which made the freedom possible. That is the spirit of Gothic Architecture.[44]

Like Ruskin, Morris held architecture, epitomized by the Gothic cathedral, to be "the foundation of all the arts." It was the medium through which the various forms of art would be integrated and unified.[45] Morris maintained that it was only through a return to this "cooperative tradition" that such a unity as was found in Gothic art could be achieved in the present day.

The writings of Ruskin, Morris, and their followers gained widespread circulation throughout the Netherlands. By 1900, four texts by Morris and eight by Ruskin appeared translated in book form. In addition to these, *De Kroniek* published several translations of essays by Morris, as well as frequent reports on the two Englishmen's work.[46] Although they dismissed Ruskin's and Morris's polemics against machine production, the artists of

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employment, as between idle and working men, or between liberal and illiberal professions." Ruskin, *Stones of Venice*, 169.

44. William Morris, "Gothic Architecture," in *News from Nowhere and Other Writings*, ed. Clive Wilmer (New York: Penguin, 2004), 339.

45. William Morris, "The Arts and Crafts of To-Day," in *Art and Its Producers, and The Arts and Crafts of To-Day: Two Addresses Delivered before the National Association for the Advancement of Art* (London: Longmans, 1901), 34.

De Stijl embraced their view of the urgent need for a moral reformation of artistic production. They embraced their British predecessors' guildlike model of a communal and collaborative form of artistic production as a foundational concept of the De Stijl project.[47] The formation of the group itself—a utopian endeavor to unify architects, furniture makers, poets, painters, and designers around the singular goal of creating a nonhierarchical, totalizing aesthetic project—was a direct offspring of Morris's and Ruskin's construction of the Gothic spirit as a mechanism for countering the perceived dissolution of social, moral, and aesthetic bonds during the modern era.

Gothic Geometry: Viollet-le-Duc and Rationalism

As De Stijl's proponents searched for intellectual precedents on which to argue for their vision for a universal aesthetic, the French neo-Gothic architect and theorist Eugène Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc proved an important complement to the social polemics found in the writings of Ruskin, Morris, and their followers. Hostile to the aesthetic and philosophical foundations of the École des Beaux-Arts under which neoclassicism was dominant, Viollet-le-Duc systematically rebutted the historical and practical underpinnings of the École's pedagogy. In his two important treatises, *Discourses on Architecture* (1863–72) and *Dictionary of French Architecture from the 11th to the 16th Century* (1854–68), Viollet-le-Duc developed a model of architecture built on structural rationalism, which served as the basis for his revaluation of architectural history as well

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46. Lieske Tibbe, "Theory Versus Practice: The Influence of Socialist Ideals on the Decorative Arts Movement in the Netherlands," in Reyer, *Industry and Design in the Netherlands,* 35–36 (see chap. 1, n. 15).

47. Nancy Troy has argued that the underlying structure of De Stijl itself can only be understood through a process of collaboration. Nancy Troy, *The De Stijl Environment* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1986).

as his critique of the stylistic eclecticism of the century. While a contentious and controversial figure in France, Viollet-le-Duc won a popular following in the Netherlands, initially through the Dutch architect Pierre Cuypers.[48] By the last decade of the nineteenth century, J. L. M. Lauweriks (1864–1932) and K. P. C. de Bazel (1869–1923), both students in Cuypers's atelier, along with J. H. de Groot (1865–1932), a professor at the Quellinus School for arts and crafts in Amsterdam, published a number of essays on the rational construction of architectural and ornamental design.[49] Drawing heavily from this circle of architects, as well as directly from Viollet-le-Duc's writings, Berlage put forward his own practical aesthetics grounded in rational mathematics, most notably in his 1908 essay "The Foundations and Development of Architecture."[50] As disseminated through this fervent network of rationalist thought, De Stijl drew two important aspects from the intellectual tradition set forth by Viollet-le-Duc's ideas on architecture and ornamentation.

The first lay in Viollet-le-Duc's conception of style. The French architect, like many of his contemporaries, sought a solution to the stylistic eclecticism so widely

48. See Suzanne Frank, "J. L. M. Lauweriks and the Dutch School of Proportion," *AA Files* 7 (September 1984): 61–67. In fact, Viollet-le-Duc was praised through much of Europe. He was instrumental theoretically in the genesis of *modernismo* in Spain and *modernismus* in East-Central Europe.

49. In 1896, Lauweriks published a two-part article, "Onderhouding over de bouwkunst door Viollet-le-Duc" [Preservation of building art by Viollet-le-Duc], reviewing the French architect's geometric systems of proportion and structure in *Architectura*. See Iain Boyd Whyte, "Introduction," in *Hendrik Petrus Berlage*, 14; n. 40 (see chap. 2, n. 12). These texts will be discused in greater detail in chapter 5.

50. Iain Boyd Whyte has noted that Berlage's essay was heavily indebted to De Groot, with whom he taught at the Quellinus School, and whose book, *Iets over ontwerpen in architecture* [On designs in architecture] published in 1900, presented a geometric superstructure through which he was able to approach his own work. Whyte, *Hendrik Petrus Berlage,* 15.

perceived as both symptom and cause of nineteenth-century relativism and decadence. He cautioned:

> When we build with bits and pieces picked up here and there—in Greece, in Italy— belonging to styles of art remote from our times and our civilization, we are really engaged in collecting body parts and members of cadavers. . . . In the created order that surrounds us . . . everything we touch or arrange or change loses its style—unless we reintroduce into the work a style of our own arising out of our own minds, the stamp of which we then place upon the disorder we would otherwise be producing.[51]

Contemporary eclecticism failed, according to Viollet-le-Duc, because it relied solely on appearance in the creation of architecture, through the recycling and capricious arrangement of historical forms. In *Discourses on Architecture*, Viollet-le-Duc conceived true style as a universal principle, fundamentally distinct from a typological or epochal form. For Viollet-le-Duc, while every epoch manifested a stylistic form, true style was transcendental and "inherent in all arts of all times."[52] He gave his concept of style a proper definition in the *Dictionnaire Raisonné:* "[Style] is, in a work of art, the manifestation of an ideal based on principle."[53] With this definition, Viollet-le-Duc upended traditional conceptions of style, as Barry Bergdoll has noted, by relocating the

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51. Eugène Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc, "Style," in *The Foundations of Architecture: Selections from the* Dictionnaire Raisonné, trans. Kenneth D. Whitehead (New York, George Braziller, 1990), 246.

52. "There is a Louis XIV style and a Louis XV style, and ingenious parties have lately discovered even a Louis XVI style," Viollet-le-Duc wrote, "yet one of the characteristics of the art of architecture at the end of the seventeenth and through the eighteenth centuries is absence of style." See Eugène Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc, *Discourses on Architecture*, trans. Henry van Brunt (Boston: James R. Osgood, 1875), 175.

53. Viollet-le-Duc, "Style," 232.

nature of style from the morphology of a decorative object or building to the process of its conception and construction.[54]

Style, Viollet-le-Duc argued, can only become manifest when "a perfect harmony between the results obtained and the means employed to achieved them" is reached.[55] According to Viollet-le-Duc, style conceived as a harmony of means was only achievable with "the intervention of reason" in the form of a geometric order.[56] To arrive at a true style was to uncover an a priori system of geometry shared universally by the structure of the natural world. "If we were to follow through and examine all these phases of creation in our own world, both organic and inorganic," Viollet-le-Duc wrote, "we would quickly find . . . from the largest mountain down to the finest crystal, from the lichen to the oaks of our forests, from the polyp to human beings, everything in terrestrial creation does indeed possess style. . . ."[57] Style, conceptualized by Viollet-le-Duc as the unified form of a rational and universal process of creation, served as an early signpost for De Stijl's rejection of the perceived capriciousness with which nineteenth-century decorative arts and architecture were pursued.[58]

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54. Bergdoll notes that in Quattremère de Quincey's *Dictionnaire historique de l'Architecture* (1832–1833), style is understood as a "characteristic trait." Barry Bergdoll, "Introduction," *The Foundations of Architecture*, 23.

55. Viollet-le-Duc, "Style," 240.

56. Viollet-le-Duc, "Style," 240.

57. Viollet-le-Duc, "Style," 240.

58. Van Doesburg wrote, "It may well be said that in the country where the capricious frenzy thrived most, in France, the reaction began. As far as architecture is concerned, it was [Henri] Labrouste [1801–1875] and especially Viollet-Le-Duc, who reacted consciously and showed that all these imitators had nothing to do with art and a house free of all convention had to emerge from the nature of its constructive necessity." [Het mag wel merkwaardig heeten, dat juist in het land, waar de grillige baroksmaak het weligst tierde, in Frankrijk, de reactie begon. Wat de architectuur betreft, waren het Labrouste en vooral Viollet Le Duc, die bewust reageerden en aantoonden, dat al die navolgelingen met kunst niets te maken hadden en een huis vrij van alle

In conjunction with his conception of the foundations of style, Viollet-le-Duc also supplied a rational basis for the revaluation of Gothic art as a model for a future style. The French architect refuted the commonly held belief that the art of the Middle Ages was driven by a "reign of confusion." The French architect instead argued with the aid of idiosyncratic architectural illustrations—including exploded plans and linear overlays—the geometry inherent in Gothic forms. As he noted:

> [The Gothic architect] devised a structural system that was free, extensive, and applicable to every kind of plan, one that allowed the utilization of every kind of material, as it did every kind of combination, from the most complex to the simplistic; . . . they applied a type of decoration to the form that never clashed with it but rather always accentuated it, meanwhile explaining this type of decoration by means of combinations of profiles traced out according to a geometric method, a method that was nothing else but a corollary of the method employed by this architecture as a whole. . . .[59]

Along with Ruskin's and Morris's conception of Gothic as a model of social harmony, Viollet-le-Duc argued that it also functioned as an aesthetic model for the unification of all arts through the fundamental principles of geometry. This was furthered by Viollet-le-Duc's juxtaposition of the true style of the medieval era with that of Imperial Rome. When the Romans sought to express themselves visually, he claimed, they failed because they borrowed the art, ideas, and principles of ancient Greece, thereby producing only a "manner" rather than style. Whereas, he contended, Gothic architecture invented new forms and geometric principles which offered greater flexibility in the arts as a whole. Viollet-le-Duc held the historical position—later embraced and entrenched in De Stijl's

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conventie uit den aard van zijn constructieven noodzaak ontstaan moest.] Van Doesburg, *Klassiek–Barok–Modern*, 20–21.

art-historical narrative—that the decline of Gothic and the emergence of the Renaissance marked the beginnings of the loss of style that would eventually be fully manifested as "modernity." He wrote, "[Gothic architecture] constituted an organic whole already on the way to modernity, and thus it is rather strange that it should have once suffered rejection as something antiquated; it is equally strange that it should have been replaced by types of architecture that are actually considerably more remote from the modern spirit."[60] In response, Viollet-le-Duc asserted that the modern architect or designer must seek out a model of geometric and universal principles similar to that of Gothic, while avoiding mere imitation which "can only produce pastiches."[61] The task of the modern artist, according to Viollet-le-Duc and as intensely advocated by the figures of De Stijl, was the invention of new, rational principles to establish an aesthetic unification once again. And in this "integrated" art, the decorative arts would play a principal structural role.

Frank Lloyd Wright: A Bridge to the Machine

In his essay "Art and Machine," which opened the third issue of *De Stijl*, Oud wrote, "It was the cardinal error of Ruskin and Morris that they brought the machine into disrepute by stigmatizing an impure use of it as its essence."[62] Oud's text was not the first to defend the machine in the pages of *De Stijl*. In the previous issue, the Italian futurist painter Gino Severini (1883–1966)—then serving as a foreign correspondent for the journal—had

59. Viollet-le-Duc, "Style," 252–53.
60. Viollet-le-Duc, "Style," 257.
61. Viollet-le-Duc, "Style," 256.

published the first installment of his series of articles, "Avant-Garde Painting."[63] In this essay, Severini shifted the terms of the machine aesthetic beyond the mere representation of a mechanical subject matter and toward a more conceptual model for understanding reality, and thus the nature of artistic production.[64] He wrote, "the precision, the rhythm, the brutality of the machines and their movements, have undoubtedly led us to a new realism that we can express without painting locomotives."[65] While establishing important comparisons between the logical construction of a machine and that of a work of art, Severini's articles in *De Stijl* would have more lasting implications for De Stijl's discourse on time and space, which was more fully embraced by the likes of Van Doesburg.[66] Nonetheless, while Oud cited Severini's text, it was the writings of the American architect Frank Lloyd Wright (1867–1959) which became an important early intellectual source for the members of De Stijl. His ideas offered a path for the group to bridge the gap between nineteenth-century social and moral constraints on the decorative arts and architecture, on the one hand, and on the other a postwar faith in the machine as a source of social and economic salvation from the catastrophe of the First World War.

In Europe during the 1910s, the Netherlands was the focal point for the dissemination of Wright's thoughts on architecture and design. Anthony Alofsin has

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62. "En het is de kardinale fout van Ruskin en Morris geweest, dat zij de machine in discrediet gebracht hebben door een onzuiver gebruik als het kenmerk van haar wezen te stempelen." Oud, "Kunst en Machine," 26 (see n. 32 above).

63. Gino Severini, "La peinture d'avant-garde," *De Stijl* 1, no. 2 (December 1917):18–20.

64. Allan Doig discussed Severini's relationship to the machine aesthetic in this essay in greater detail. Doig, *Theo van Doesburg,* 38–39 (see chap. 1, n. 14).

65. "Le précision, le rythme, la brutalité des machines et leurs mouvements, nous ont sans doute conduits vers un nouveau réalisme que nous pouvons exprimer sans peindre des locomotives." Severini, "La peinture d'avant-garde," 18.

66. This topic will be discussed at greater length in chapter 7.

argued that it was in Dutch architectural circles that Wright found his earliest and most vocal support on the continent.[67] The historian questioned the reach of Wright's famous publications: *Ausgeführte Bauten und Entwürfe von Frank Lloyd Wright*, a monograph of drawings of Wright's architectural projects and designs; and *Frank Lloyd Wright: Ausgeführte Bauten*, a more affordable publication of photographic reproductions of Wright's completed projects; printed in Berlin by Wasmuth Verlag in 1910 and 1911, respectively. He turned instead to the Netherlands as the focal point of Wrightian interest beginning in the years just before World War I. Although Wright's work had been known to a small group of architects in the Netherlands before 1911, it was Berlage's lecture tour through the United States that became a critical turning point in the circulation of Wright's ideas within the country and beyond.[68] Berlage's initial aim in his travels to the United States, beyond his speaking engagements, had been to view the work of architect Henry Hobson Richardson (1838–86); however, it was the profound impression of Wright's work that returned with him to the Netherlands. Following the trip, in 1913, Berlage published his book *Memoir of an American Journey*. In this text he praised Wright's projects in particular among American architects and designers for seeming to have emerged free of any tradition.[69] Robert van 't Hoff, a founding member of De Stijl, traveled to the United States in the same year, visiting buildings completed by Wright such as Unity Temple (Oak Park, Illinois, 1905–08; fig. 3.2) and the Larkin Building

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67. Anthony Alofsin, "Wright, Influence, and the World at Large," in *Frank Lloyd Wright: Europe and Beyond*, ed. Anthony Alofsin (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 2–3.

68. Mariëtte van Stralen has highlighted encounters with American architecture by important Dutch architects such as Jan Frederik Staal (1879–1940) and Lauweriks. She argued that American architecture was already being critically discussed within the country and served as a premise for Berlage's American journey. Mariëtte van Stralen, "Kindred Spirits: Holland, Wright, and Wijdeveld," in Alofsin, *Frank Lloyd Wright*, 45–46.

69. Van Stralen, "Kindred Spirits," 45.

(Buffalo, New York, 1904–06), while also meeting the architect himself.[70] The following year, Jan Wils entered Berlage's studio, where he learned of Wright's practice and became deeply committed to Wright's prairie house designs, focusing particularly on their organization of space through the open floor plan.[71] These three architects were the principal sources for spreading the awareness of Wright's work to the members of De Stijl, including Gerrit Rietveld, Huszar, Van Doesburg, and Oud.

For several competing modernist groups within the Netherlands, Wright's ideas became a fertile ground for defending their particular positions on the direction of modern architecture and design. The Amsterdam School—De Stijl's primary rival within the Netherlands—shared with the group a desire to reorient architecture toward a communal ideal. Drawing from Wright, however, the Amsterdam School viewed this as possible only through the will of the individual artist-architect, expressed by the implementation of creative programs of natural and allegorical motifs.[72] The Amsterdam School's interpretation of Wrightian ideas was strongly criticized by Huszar, who argued that the group's excess use of decorative motifs had devolved into individualism and arbitrariness.[73] De Stijl rejected any reading of Wright's ideas as centering upon the

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70. Van Stralen, "Kindred Spirits," 48.

71. Van Stralen, "Kindred Spirits," 50.

72. Wim de Wit has complicated the traditional historiographic distinction of the two groups, showing that certain shared ideological positions existed between the Amsterdam School and De Stijl. Wim de Wit, ed., *The Amsterdam School: Dutch Expressionist Architecture, 1915–1930* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1983). Anthony Alofsin also discusses the intellectual sources of both groups and their shared roots in the ideas of Wright. See Anthony Alofsin, "Frank Lloyd Wright and the Dutch Connection," in *Frank Lloyd Wright and the Netherlands,* ed. Herman van Bergeijk (Rotterdam: Uitgeverij 010, 2008), 27.

73. Huszar was discussing the *Scheepvaarthuis* (Amsterdam, 1912) in a lecture delivered at the Second Congress of Modern Art in Antwerp in 1922 and published the following year in *Bouwkundig Weekblad*. See Huszar, "Over de moderne toegepaste kunsten," 59–69 (see chap. 1, n. 46).

individualistic; instead, following Berlage's own understanding of Wright's concepts, they saw parallels between the American architect's employment of democracy as a unifying ideal and their own collective aesthetic model.[74] Yet it was Wright's advocacy of the machine as a model for social and artistic reformation that circulated with the most credence among De Stijl artists.

In one of his most important lectures, "The Art and Craft of the Machine," delivered in 1901 to the Arts and Crafts Society at Hull House in Chicago and subsequently reproduced in a number of journals, Wright articulated a decisive defense of the "Machine" and its role in the future of the decorative arts and architecture.[75] Wright defended the legacy of Ruskin and Morris. He argued that their opposition to machine production in the previous century had been justified in the face of the "murderous ubiquity" of decorative objects "deluging the civilized world" with the rise of industrial mass production.[76] Yet, Wright maintained, the machine had brought an end to the historical notion of "Art in the grand old sense," whose value was rooted in the "handicraft ideal."[77] Rather, Wright viewed the machine as a key to the liberation of the worker, both industrial and artistic, from the toil of mindless, base labor. He argued forcefully:

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74. Wright's actual position differed from that perceived by De Stijl. "I do not believe we will ever again have the uniformity of type which has characterized the so-called great 'styles.' Conditions have changed; our ideal is Democracy, the highest possible expression of the individual as a unit not inconsistent with a harmonious whole." Frank Lloyd Wright, "In the Cause of Architecture," in *Frank Lloyd Wright: Collected Writings, Volume 1,* ed. Bruce Brooks Pfeiffer (New York: Rizzoli, 1992), 89. De Stijl's misreading of Wright was not unlike its misinterpretation of Hegel and Nietzsche, as discussed in Chapter 1.

75. "Machine" is capitalized throughout the essay. See Frank Lloyd Wright, "The Art and Craft of the Machine," *Brush and Pencil* 8, no. 2 (May 1901): 78.

76. Wright, "Machine," 78.

77. Wright, "Machine," 78.

> The Machine is Intellect mastering the drudgery of earth that the plastic art may live; that the margin of leisure and strength by which man's life upon the earth can be made beautiful, may immeasurably widen; its function ultimately to emancipate human expression! . . . Greece used the chattel slave as the essential tool of its art and civilization. This tool we have discarded, and we would refuse to return to Greek art upon the terms of its restoration, because we insist now upon a basis of Democracy.[78]

Wright explicitly linked this greater freedom of leisure and creative expression afforded by the machine with a democratic ideal, one that inevitably leads toward social progress. Such progress would not be immediate, however, for the machine's interjection into industrial and artistic production would be a destructive process, inverting the "ideals and tendencies" previously placed on production. This was necessary, in Wright's view, because every style historically has been, and thus now must be, predicated on the "best tools or contrivances it knows"; which in the modern era, he contended, was the machine.[79] Hence it became the task of the artist to educate the public on the "salvation in disguise" hidden within the power of machine production.

Oud drew from Wright's ideas on the nature of the machine in modern art, arguing in "Art and Machine" several points that paralleled his American contemporary.[80] Oud asserted that the expression of the universal in aesthetic form was predicated on the unification of three factors: "spirit (seen as a unity of intuition and consciousness), material and method of production."[81] Tabling a discussion on the

78. Wright, "Machine," 79–80.

79. Wright, "Machine," 80.

80. Allan Doig has outlined the strong impression Berlage made on Oud's understanding of Wright's ideas. Doig, *Theo van Doesburg*, 46.

81. Oud, "Art and Machine," 97.

spirit—a topic he felt had already been addressed within the context of *De Stijl*—Oud argued that the only way to bring materials into harmony with methods of production is through the machine. As noted above, he firmly criticized the error in the morality of handcraftsmanship advocated for by Ruskin and Morris, noting that such modes of production resulted in arbitrary treatment and formal variation in the ornamentation of objects and architecture, as well as an emphasis on the individuality of the artisan's hand. Oud insisted, to the contrary, not simply that the machine provided a uniform treatment of materials, but that "also from the social point of view, from the economic standpoint, the machine is the best means of manufacturing products which will be of more benefit to the community than the art products of the present time, which reach only the wealthy individual."[82]

In "Art and Machine," Oud specifically identified the machine as an essential economic tool for greater social equity, and in the process highlighted the irony of the Arts and Crafts movement: it advocated socialist politics of equality while producing works of decorative arts and architecture largely unattainable for those outside the upper class. Oud and his De Stijl collaborators deemed the Ruskinian rejection of machine production a romantic position no longer tenable under the demands of modernity. Van Doesburg later made his case for the use of the machine in similar, although slightly more cautious terms, in his essay "The Will to Style":

> A style which no longer aims to create individual paintings, ornaments or private houses but, rather, aims to study through team-work entire quarters of a town, skyscrapers, and airports—as the economic situation prescribes—cannot be concerned with handicraft. This can be achieved only with the aid of the machine,

82. Oud, "Art and Machine," 97.

> because handicraft represents a distinctly individual attitude which contemporary developments have surpassed. Handicraft debased *man* to the status of a machine; the correct use of the machine (to build up a culture) is the only path leading towards the opposite, social liberation. However, mechanical production is by no means the sole prerequisite for faultless creation. Not quantity, but quality is the premise for a correct use of the machine. The machine should direct the artistic mind towards the purpose of art.[83]

Van Doesburg insisted that while the expansion of accessibility was critical in enacting a totalizing environment, a demand for quality still remained—a quality which, as will be discussed in chapter 7, in practice prevented De Stijl designs from reaching any level of mass production.

Wright's plea for the machine struck a chord with De Stijl in particular, and within the Netherlands in general, as it coincided with a pressing demand for housing and goods, prompted by the rapid urbanization of the country at the end of the nineteenth century. The need for mechanization was further emphasized and promoted by a new generation of social democratic parliamentarians who entered government at the turn of the century, following the rise of organized labor unions and the growing popularity of socialism in response to such urgent material needs.[84] These conditions allowed Morris's position regarding the relationship between craftsman and machine to be ideologically reversed. Michael White summarized this inversion of the discourse, noting:

> Where Morris had been concerned about the relation between working-class producers, now driven into factory production, and a consuming middle class, in

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83. Theo van Doesburg, "The Will to Style: The Redesign of Life, Art and Technology," in *Theo van Doesburg*, 122 (see chap. 1, n. 75). (Originally published as "Der Wille zum Stil (Neugestaltung von Leben, Kunst und Technik)," *De Stijl* 5, no. 3 [March 1922]: 33–34.)

84. Bank and Van Buuren, *Bourgeois Culture*, 130 (see chap. 1, n. 5).

> the Netherlands the debate revolved around middle class-producers for the working-class consumer. As such, less anxiety was expressed concerning machine production, which was seen by many as a necessity for the creation of cheap, accessible goods. . . .[85]

For Oud and the other members of De Stijl, the reappraisal of the machine and mechanical production as a future avenue through which art could be disseminated to the masses was crucial in constructing their specific vision of a totalizing unification of art and society, while differentiating their ideological aims from those of rivals such as the Amsterdam School. Wright's centrality would eventually be usurped by competing metaphors of the machine aesthetic by the Bauhaus and later the Congrès internationaux d'architecture moderne (CIAM; 1928–58) in the decade that followed. However, the American architect provided an essential justification for the machine as a signifier, at least rhetorically, not simply of a broader modernity but of the possible expanded accessibility of art in the modern age.[86]

Against Art Nouveau: Hermann Muthesius and *Sachlichkeit*

In 1919, Vilmos Huszar published in *De Stijl* the last of his series of short didactic essays entitled "Aesthetic Considerations." Each essay in the series followed a similar format: Huszar guided the reader through two juxtaposed images illustrating his central theoretical or aesthetic concepts, in order to elucidate and clarify the often ambiguous and esoteric language that so frequently filled the pages of *De Stijl*. In this case, two

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85. White, *De Stijl and Dutch Modernism*, 113.

86. By the 1920s Wright's incorporation of eclectic decorative motifs, such as in his Midway Gardens project, led to his dismissal by the likes of Van Doesburg and Oud, both of whom became critical players in the development of the "international style" of architecture during that decade. See Alfosin, "Wright, Influence, and the World at Large," 8–9.

architectural projects—Robert van 't Hoff's Villa Henny (Utrecht, 1914–19; fig. 3.3) and Amsterdam School architect Cornelis Jouke Blaauw's (1885–1947) *Huis Meerhoek* (Bergen, 1917–18; fig. 3.4)—were the focus. Unsurprisingly, Huszar's text provided a detailed defense of the Wright-inspired home by Van 't Hoff, while offering a pointed critique of Blaauw's project. Huszar argued that Blaauw's design did not incorporate, and thus could not emerge synthetically from, the demands of the "elements of construction"—those being modern building materials such as reinforced concrete. As a result, Huszar claimed, "the need arose for other elements in the construction" in Blaauw's project, such as the anachronistic use of thatched roofing and decorative distribution of windows.[87] Huszar concluded: "A building, such as [Blaauw's Huis Meerhoek], and many like it (see Park Meerwijk in Bergen), one could call, in a sense, an accident, because it stands entirely outside the essence and demands of the modern era. The era of Secession and Jugendstil, in which such effects are pursued, lies behind us."[88] Huszar's evocation of Viennese Secessionism and German Jugendstil (in fact, Art Nouveau at large) and his conflation of these movements with Blaauw's work in particular, and the Amsterdam School in general, was tactical.

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87. "Het gebouw op bijlage 4 kon niet onstaan uit de functie der reele deelen, daarom ontstond de behoefte aan andere elementen bij de bouw." Vilmos Huszar, "Aesthetische Beschouwing bij Bijlagen 3 en 4" [Aesthetic consideration of appendices 3 and 4], *De Stijl* 2, no. 3 (January 1919), 29.

88. "Een gebouw, als bijl. 4 en vele dergelijke (zie Park Meerwijk te Bergen) zou men in dien zin verongelukt kunnen noemen, omdat het geheel buiten het wezen en de eischen van den werkelijk modernen tijd staat. De tijd van Secession en Jugenstil, waarin men zulk effect-najagen, ligt achter ons." Huszar, "Aesthetische Beshouwing," 30. Blaauw's House Meerhoek was one of three detached homes designed by the architect for an artists' colony in Bergen. Blaauw was one of five architects commissioned to produce villas for the project by the tile manufacturer, A. M. A. Heytee.

The critical thrust of Huszar's argument against Blaauw drew upon a well-established body of polemics against Art Nouveau promoted by the Deutscher Werkbund in the years preceding World War I. The Werkbund received widespread attention within the Netherlands in journals such as *Bouwkundig Weekblad* and *Architectura*, both of which closely followed the group's theories on architecture, design, and the decorative arts, and gave extensive coverage to the 1914 Cologne Exhibition.[89] The spreading interest in the Werkbund within the Netherlands led to the attempted formation of two organizations: that of the Hollandsche Werkbond in the years preceding the war; and the Driebond, or Nederlandsche Werkbond, in the years after the conflict.[90] The artists of De Stijl remained removed from such organizations, as Allan Doig noted, due to the two Dutch institutions' overtly national tone, lack of ideological and aesthetic coherence, and, of course, De Stijl's own efforts to form a collective of artists to address similar social and cultural issues.[91] While uninterested and unwilling to be associated with the attempts to form a Dutch branch of the Werkbund, De Stijl's awareness of those affiliated with the Deutscher Werkbund and their rich debates on style were leveraged to emphasize the group's distance from Art Nouveau movements. De Stijl also argued for the Werkbund's theoretical and aesthetic program as the next step in the progression of an emerging trend of straightforward, rational design in architecture and the decorative arts.[92]

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89. Jan Gratama, editor of *Bouwkundig Weekblad*, published an article on June 27, 1914 called "Kroniek LIX: De Duitsche Werkbund en zijn beteekenis voor Nederland" [The German Werkbund and its significance for the Netherlands], in which he praised the machine and engineer as the models the architect should follow. Doig, *Theo van Doesburg*, 50.

90. Adi Martis, "Some Organizations and Their Activities," in Reyer, *Industry and Design in the Netherlands*, 22–30 (see n. 46 above).

91. Doig, *Theo van Doesburg,* 49–53.

92. The Werkbund's yearbooks of 1912, 1913, and 1914 were all included in the De Stijl library.

Hermann Muthesius (1861–1927), a founding member of the Werkbund, made significant inroads into the Netherlands with the publication of the translation of his book *Culture and Art* in 1911. Muthesius's work also frequently appeared in the writings of Berlage, who repeatedly quoted from the German architect's influential text *Style-Architecture and Building-Art* (1902) throughout his own 1908 essay, "The Foundations and Development of Architecture."[93] Muthesius emerged as an early and vocal critic of Jugendstil and its signature "whiplash line." Jugendstil, Muthesius argued, in its purely formalist endeavor to invent a new style fell into the same aesthetic trap that had driven the stylistic eclecticism of the nineteenth century: that being that it failed to create ornament based on universal principles. Muthesius asserted that the aesthetic foundations of Art Nouveau were premised on the arbitrary and recent inventions of a "few artistic personalities," such as Henry van de Velde (1863–1957).[94] Worse still, in the German architect's view, was the derivative form of Jugendstil produced by less skilled followers, as well as by industrialists who applied the whiplash aesthetic to mass-produced goods. In response, Muthesius argued that Jugendstil's true nature was fashion masquerading as style, serving the "sham" tastes of an emerging parvenu class.

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93. The full title of Muthesius's text was *Kultur und Kunst: Gesammelte Aufsätze über kunstkritische Fragen der Gegenwart* (Jena: Eugen Diederichs, 1904).

94. "But now we sank into boundless caprice, deriving everything from the works of a few artistic personalities. From such a personal art we derived less understanding than from the historical styles. The new ornament that was to develop through a study of plants (which had been extolled as a solution) remained, in the hands of lesser artists, just as poor, insipid, and helpless as the art of the leader, when reduced by generalization to a watery soup. Thus with the so-called Jugendstil we have been led into a worse channel than that in which we sailed in the time of stylistic imitation." See Hermann Muthesius, *Style-Architecture and Building-Art,* trans. Stanford Anderson (Santa Monica: Getty Publication Programs, 1994), 87. (Originally published as *Stilarchitektur und Baukunst* [Mülheim-Ruhr: K. Schimmelpfeng, 1902].)

Muthesius concluded his argument against Jugendstil by noting that "Jugendstil was invented by those still pandering to the sensibility of a parvenu society that desired pretentious and heavily decorated ornamental art—and for whom the understanding of the true modernity, which lies in an appropriate straightforwardness [Sachlichkeit] rather than in applied ornament, had not yet dawned."[95] Muthesius understood the concept of *Sachlichkeit* (translated in Dutch as *zaklijkheid*, directly from German) as the "abstention from all superficial forms of decoration," which stood against the arbitrary use of styles in the previous century through a commitment to the shaping of architectural form "according to the demands set by purpose."[96] Underlying his notion of *Sachlichkeit*, however, was not a mere nascent functionalist credo that would come into true form in the years following World War I with the establishment of the Bauhaus. Rather, as Frederic Schwartz has argued, Muthesius "saw the everyday object as reduced to the status of a blank field on which ornament was displayed in arbitrary, and arbitrarily changing, ways, generating meaning at a rate proportional to and determined by production capacity and warehouse stocks. Ornament, to them, was the group of visual forms with *exchange value.*"[97] For Muthesius, *Sachlichkeit* was not the aesthetic manifestation of functional form; instead, it expressed an aesthetic state free of all caprice and fashionable ornamentation, comprising the unified relationship between form and

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95. Muthesius, *Style-Architecture and Building-Art*, 88.

96. Muthesius, *Style-Architecture and Building-Art,* 79.

97. Frederic Schwartz, *The Werkbund: Design, Theory, and Mass Culture before the First World War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 34–35. Georg Simmel responded along similar critical lines in his "The Problem of Style" (Das Problem des Stiles), first given as a lecture in 1907. Simmel diagnosed the problem of style as the result of the "exaggerated subjectivity of our time," the source of which was the alienated state of the subject under capitalism. For Simmel, in order to rediscover a single, general style the individual must submit to the universal principles of a culture. Schwartz, *Werkbund*, 63.

surface.[98] While De Stijl theory took little interest in Muthesius's analysis of *Sachlichkeit* through the lens of capital, the value of his theorization of *Sachlichkeit* came in turn, as Joost Baljeu has outlined, in De Stijl's antifunctionalist stance toward simplified design in the decorative arts and architecture. Influenced as well by the traditions set forth by Semper, De Stijl's aim to reconcile surface and form aesthetically rather than materially would differentiate the group's theoretical aims from those of competing movements emerging in Germany and France in the opening years of the 1920s—a topic that will be addressed further in chapter 7.[99]

Hendrik Petrus Berlage: The Style of *Gemeenschapskunst*

Up to this point, this chapter has focused on figures outside the Netherlands who exerted a defining influence on De Stijl's aesthetic, moral, and political world view. But within Holland itself, the founders of De Stijl were inspired by native thinkers and practitioners, especially those who promoted the arts as a means to develop (or consolidate) a sense of community. In the first issue of *De Stijl,* Van Doesburg addressed the journal's aims in the following terms:

> [This periodical] will thus prepare the way for the existence of a more profound artistic culture, founded on the *communal* [*gemeenschaplijke*] embodiment of the new plastic artistic consciousness. As soon as the artists in the various fields of plastic art will have realized that they must speak a universal language, they will no longer cling to their individuality with such anxiety. By serving the general

98. Schwartz, *Werkbund*, 41–42.

99. Joost Baljeu, "De Stijl and Proun versus Functionalism: 1923," in *Theo van Doesburg*, 55–58 (see chap. 1, n. 75). Gottfried Semper's principle of *Bekleidung* set the foundation for Muthesius's critique of ornamentation within architecture and the decorative arts. This shared intellectual origin and the full implication of Semper's *Bekleidung* principle in relation to De Stijl's antifunctionalism in design will be discussed in the following section.

> principle they will be made to produce, of their own accord, an organic style. The propagation of beauty necessitates a spiritual community and not a social one. A spiritual community, however, cannot arise without sacrificing the ambitious individuality. Only by consistently following this principle can the new plastic beauty manifest itself in all objects as a style, born from a new relationship between the artist and society.[100]

Van Doesburg's exhortation for a communal art was not unique to De Stijl discourse; rather, this idea of socially oriented communal or public art (*gemeenschapskunst*) had circulated widely throughout the Netherlands since the 1890s.[101]

The concept gained ideological form through a number of Dutch translations of texts by the members of the British Arts and Crafts movement, such as Ruskin, Morris, and Walter Crane (1845–1915), as well as the growing influence of socialist thought within the country during the closing decade of the nineteenth century.[102] The term itself was coined in 1891 by the Dutch artist Antoon Derkinderen (1859–1925), who, motivated by his growing interest in socialism, sought to reunite art and society through a cooperative model of artistic production. The concept of *gemeenschapskunst* garnered further intellectual credence and circulation through polemical texts written by the Dutch critics Alphons Diepenbrock (1862–1921) and Jan Veth (1864–1925) in the magazine *De Nieuwe Gids*, and later *De Kroniek*.[103] Yet it was the Dutch architect and theorist

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100. Van Doesburg, "Ter inleiding," 11 (see chap. 1, n. 3).

101. *Gemeenschapskunst* carried a number of meanings, none of which lends itself to a simple translation. Michael White adopted the specific rendering "community art" in *De Stijl and Dutch Modernism,* 1. However, as Bank and Van Buuren noted, in journals such as *De Nieuwe Gids*, "*Gemeenschapskunst* . . . was also described as public art, monumental art, the art of ideas, decorative art, life art, applied art or social art, art of the people, democratic art, and even proletarian art." Bank and Van Buuren, *Bourgeois Culture*, 142.

102. Beckett, "Discoursing on Dutch Modernism," 79 (see chap. 1, n. 9).

103. Bank and Van Buuren, *Bourgeois Culture*, 141.

Berlage—who has already been mentioned throughout this chapter—who became one of the most prominent and influential figures to take part in these debates on the communal role of art. In several well-known theoretical treatises published in the two and a half decades around the opening of the twentieth century, Berlage advocated for an idea of *gemeenschapskunst* centered upon a syncretic blend of rationalism and socialist thought. His work was deeply influential for De Stijl's own theoretical posture. For example, Berlage served as a close mentor to De Stijl affiliates such as the architect J. J. P. Oud. Jan Wils had worked directly in Berlage's office from 1914 to 1916. Meanwhile, Bart van der Leck collaborated with the famous Dutch architect and designer on commissions for the shipping and mining firm, Müller and Company—to be discuessed in chapter 4. Finally, Van Doesburg, who studied Berlage's writings in depth, unsuccessfully invited him to be a contributor to *De Stijl*.[104]

Berlage—as so many contemporary aesthetic, social, and philosophical thinkers (including those discussed above)—sought to diagnose and treat the underlying causes that had turned the nineteenth century into what he described as the "age of ugliness," dominated by a blight of "sham architecture." In his 1905 essay *Thoughts on Style in Architecture*, Berlage traced this aesthetic degradation to two principal causes: the first was social, brought about by the ill effects of unbridled capitalism; and the second metaphysical, resulting from a loss of a unifying spiritual foundation in the wake of Christianity's waning legitimacy as society became increasingly more secular.[105] Berlage wrote:

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104. White, *De Stijl and Dutch Modernism*, 7.

105. The text was originally given as two lectures in Krefeld, Germany, in January 1904, and was first published in German as *Gedanken über Stil in der Baukunst* (Leipzig: Julius Zeitler, 1905). It

> When I speak of ugliness in the realm of the spirit, I am referring to the total lack of what one might call a common purpose in our existence, a sense of working together toward one goal. A certain consecration of life is lacking, ultimately a lack not of education . . . but of culture, which is something quite different. For is not culture the accord between a spiritual core, the result of communal aspiration, and its reflection in material form, that is to say, art? Humanity, seen as the community, no longer has an ideal. Personal interests have replaced mutual, spiritual interests and have assumed a purely materialist form, money.[106]

Berlage's concluding remarks—giving mention to the subjugation of communal interests in favor of an ascending culture of materialism and individualism—stemmed directly from his politics. An ardent socialist, Berlage charted the modern cultural and aesthetic crisis back to the Renaissance. It was with the Renaissance and its promotion of a staunch individualism under humanist thought and the eventual emergence of Protestantism, Berlage argued, that the communal model of the medieval guild was abandoned, bringing forth the first traces of modern bourgeois culture.[107] Berlage contended that it was this shift towards an individualistic form of labor that permitted painting and sculpture's independence—alienated from any specific site and easily monetized as commodity—at the expense of the communally oriented, unifying art of architecture. With the emergence

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was translated into Dutch as "Beschouwingen over stijl" and was included in the 1910 compilation of essays *Studies over bouwkunst, stijl en samenleving* [Studies on architecture, style, and society] (Rotterdam: W. L. & J. Brusse, 1910). Whyte and de Wit, *Hendrik Petrus Berlage*, 153, n. 1 (see n. 12 above).

106. Berlage, "Thoughts on Style," in Whyte and de Wit, *Hendrik Petrus Berlage,* 126.

107. Berlage, "Art and Society," in Whyte and de Wit, *Hendrik Petrus Berlage*, 292, 295. (Originally published as "Kunst en maatschappij," *De Beweging* 5 [November 1909]: 166–86; [December 1909]: 229–64.)

of the Renaissance, according to Berlage, "the end of architecture, that is, of architectural style coincided with it."[108]

Berlage pointed to this loss of a unifying, communal spiritual ideal as the principal agent in the atrophy of style into eclecticism in the nineteenth century. The historical foundation for Berlage's understanding of stylistic eclecticism in architecture and the decorative arts came from Hegel's *Aesthetics*.[109] As discussed in chapter 2, Hegel believed that the Reformation marked a point of rupture at which the bond between art and the affective power it achieved through its representation of divine or spiritual content had been severed. The ideal unity of sensuous form and spirit, epitomized by the paradigmatic beauty of classical Greco-Roman art, was forever lost to the past.[110] Such a task was now deferred to the fields of religion and philosophy, while aesthetics in the modern age was forced to turn toward the secular and prosaic, making, as Hegel noted, "*Humanus* its new holy of holies."[111] Untethered from its historical role as divine mediator, art no longer need restrict itself to a particular form. Now, Hegel suggested, all historical styles or modes of representation were open to the artist:

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108. Berlage, "Art and Society," 295.

109. In his 1908 text "The Foundations and Development of Architecture," Berlage directly quotes a passage from Hegel's *Aesthetics* pertaining to the end of art: "'It is certainly the case,' says Hegel, 'that art no longer affords that satisfaction of spiritual needs which earlier ages and nations sought in it, and found in it alone, a satisfaction that, at least on the part of religion, was most intimately linked to art.'" Berlage, "The Foundations and Development of Architecture," 246 (see chap. 1, n. 43). (Originally published as "Eenige beschouwingen over klassieke bouwkunst," *De Beweging* 4 [August 1908], 115–34.)

110. "Thus the 'after' of art consists in the fact that there dwells in the spirit the need to satisfy itself solely in its own inner self as the true form for truth to take. . . . We may well hope that art will always rise higher and come to perfection, but the form of art has ceased to be the supreme need of the spirit. No matter how excellent we find the status of the Greek gods, no matter how we see God the Father, Christ, and Mary so estimably and perfectly portrayed: it is no help; we bow the knee no longer [before these artistic portrayals]." Hegel, *Aesthetics*, 103 (see chap. 1, n. 60).

> Bondage to a particular subject-matter and a mode of portrayal suitable for this material alone are for artists today something past, and art therefore has become a free instrument which the artist can wield in proportion to his subjective skill in relation to any material of whatever kind. . . . Today there is no material which stands in and for itself above this relativity, and even if one matter be raised above it, still there is at least no absolute need for its representation by art.[112]

Under his concept of history shaped by his Hegelian notion of the end of art, in conjunction with a Marxian reading of the rise of alienated labor under capitalism, Berlage believed a truly modern style could only be attained by the reinstitution of a unifying spiritual principle to guide all aesthetic practice.

He saw this modern ideal as achievable in a rationalist system based upon the universal foundation of mathematics. Berlage argued, "The present resides between two conditions, and all manifestations of the new art can be explained, on the one hand, by the lack of religious philosophical convention, and, on the other, by the longing for this convention. Christianity is dead, and one scarcely senses the faintest beginning of a new form of universal order, which must be founded on the results of research in the natural sciences."[113] Drawing upon writings by Viollet-le-Duc and Semper, as well as popular scientific figures such as Georges Cuvier (1769–1832), Berlage insisted that art be based on the same universalizing mathematics that governs natural phenomena—from the shape of a flower to the movements of celestial bodies. Art, Berlage claimed, like nature, can construct an infinite variety of visual forms upon a foundation of a relatively limited number of mathematical equations and geometric structures. Berlage cited on multiple

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111. Hegel, *Aesthetics*, 607.
112. Hegel, *Aesthetics*, 605.
113. Berlage, "Thoughts on Style," 150.

occasions a passage written by Semper for the Prolegomena to his treatise *Der Stil*, highlighting the German architect's argument that, as in nature, "art is also based on a few standard forms and types. . . . Therefore, nothing is arbitrary; everything is conditioned by circumstances and relations."[114] With this organicist model, Berlage argued that all historical styles share a set of base forms. To produce a style of the future equal to historical styles, it was the task of modern artists to uncover and return to the ontological foundations of form that have engendered all great styles in the past. Berlage distilled this premise—the interrelation of a multiplicity of elements through a singular unifying structure—into his mantra: "Style is unity in diversity."[115] For Berlage, only when the various discordant visual elements of a given work reach a balanced "repose" is style achieved. His concept of "unity in diversity" was incorporated into De Stijl aesthetics early on, occupying a dominant position in the writings of Mondrian, Van Doesburg, and Oud.

Berlage's exhortation, however, was not intended as merely a model of aesthetic theorization; rather, he emphasized the need for this principle to be the foundation for a "practical aesthetics," akin to that espoused by Viollet-le-Duc and Semper, one that would be realized in the built environment and could lead to the establishment of a

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114. The full quotation reads: "Just as nature with her infinite abundance is very sparse in her motives, repeating continually the same basic forms by modifying them a thousand fold according to the formative stage reached by living beings and their different conditions of existence, shortening some parts and lengthening others, developing parts which are only alluded to in others, just as nature has her history of development within which old motives are discernible in every new formation—in the same way art is also based on a few standard forms and types that stem from the most ancient traditions and that always reappear yet offer an infinite variety and like nature's types have their history. Therefore, nothing is arbitrary; everything is conditioned by circumstances and relations." Berlage, "The Foundations and Development of Architecture," 187.

115. Berlage attributed the phrase to Goethe. Berlage, "Thoughts on Style," 139.

gemeenschapskunst that responded to the needs of modern society. Principally, he drew a direct connection between construction and labor, demanding, along the lines of Ruskin and Morris, a communal coming together of alienated labor around the act of rational construction. He argued:

> Rational construction can become the basis of the new art. Only when this principle has not merely prevailed but has also been put into general application, shall we stand at the gate of a new art. This will be the moment at which the new universal spirit (*Weltgefühl*), the social equality of all men, will be manifested.[116]

For Berlage, the fundamentally social nature of architecture's construction and use made it the critical locus for such a social unification to occur. This utopian task, Berlage argued, can only be achieved when the individualism of the modern artist is relinquished, and the arts of painting and sculpture move away from "their present character as easel painting and salon figure" and become reunited with architecture in a totalizing environment. "Architecture," Berlage wrote, "will then reassume the first position among the arts, precisely because it is the true art of the people (*Volkskunst*), not the art of the individual but the art of all, the art of the community in which the spirit of the time is reflected. Architecture demands the collaboration of all energies, and these can only be applied to spiritual ends when everyone is economically independent."[117] While the status of architecture remained a point of contention among De Stijl members, the collaborative model outlined by Berlage lay at the heart of the group's vision for the arts. As Nancy Troy described, the level of collaboration between De Stijl artists—for Troy between painters and architects, yet in truth, even more between competing personal positions and

116. Berlage, "Thoughts on Style," 150.
117. Berlage, "Thoughts on Style," 151.

theoretical platforms rather than positions defined by practiced mediums—propelled many of De Stijl's internal polemics since the publication of the journal's first issue.[118] Yet for the artists of De Stijl, as for Berlage, the shared belief remained that the architectural projects best suited to enact this utopian vision in the present were public buildings, particularly community housing. In such buildings, Berlage envisioned a unification of social and aesthetic needs, guided by the collaboration of the various arts and premised on a system of universal mathematics. This ideal of *gemeenschapskunst*, toward which such projects would take the first step, served as an important precedent for De Stijl's own utopian project a decade later.

Conclusion

This chapter has adduced the histories of thought and polemics that defined the discursive space surrounding the decorative arts, and were instrumental in shaping the framework of De Stijl theory. For the artists of De Stijl, the outbreak and subsequent devastation of the First World War compelled the revisitation and reassessment of many core issues at stake in the rise of modernity in Europe. To this end the decorative arts, which served as a fulcrum around which many of modernity's central problems had been critically explored and debated over the previous century and a half, proved a significant hermeneutic tool. The decorative arts were the object of particular exegetical fervor during the nineteenth century, as the century's stylistic eclecticism functioned as the paradigmatic visual manifestation of the period's perceived transitory nature. During this period the traditional systems of metaphysical and historical meaning had dissolved, while having

118. See n. 47 above.

yet to be reconstituted in a new and fully realized form. The temporal heterogeneity of the modern age's fluid and fractious mixture of traditional and emerging social, political, economic, and epistemological structures reinforced a lost sense of cohesion understood to be inherent in all previous historical periods. The resolution of this lack of cohesion was seen in aesthetic terms through numerous theorizations of the concept of style, all of which sought different avenues for the reunification of a culture and its age.

The conditions brought on by World War I made these issues surrounding the decorative arts acutely present once again. De Stijl's utopian project was fundamentally committed not to resuscitating, but rather transcending these debates around the decorative arts. With a distance afforded both temporally and politically by the neutrality of the Netherlands, the artists of De Stijl drew upon the rich collection of sources, as outlined above, that were linked to themes concerning the decorative arts. De Stijl synthesized these discourses with those pertaining to the traditional genres of the fine arts, in a highly idiosyncratic ideological platform which could conform to the social and cultural demands of the postwar climate and set forth the beginnings of its totalizing vision of a final style for the modern age. To fully understand De Stijl's utopian vision is thus to turn anachronistically to the heterogeneous histories of events, figures, and thoughts around the decorative arts. As Didi-Huberman noted, "the history of images is a history of objects that are temporally impure, complex, [and] overdetermined. It is therefore a history of polychronistic, heterochronistic, or anachronistic objects."[119] In the chapters that follow, such objects and their formal anachronisms will come to the

119. Didi-Huberman, "Before the Image," 42 (see n. 4 above).

foreground of analysis, as the constellations of thought explored in this chapter will settle into a matrix within which such analysis will be contextualized.

Part 2:
De Stijl Practice

4 Developed Surface/Heterotopic Space: De Stijl and the Developed Surface Interior

In 1916, Bart van der Leck received a commission to devise an interior color scheme for a room in Villa Groot Haesebroek, the recently purchased home of Anton and Helene Kröller-Müller in Wassenaar, an affluent suburb of The Hague (fig. 4.1). Hendricus Peter Bremmer (1871–1956), the Dutch art critic and advisor, had introduced Van der Leck to the wealthy shipping magnates and patrons of modern art in 1914.[1] By the time of the commission, Van der Leck had already worked on several projects for the Kröller-Müllers, including the couple's previous home, Huize ten Vijver.[2] Under the supervision of Hendrik Petrus Berlage, who oversaw the renovation of Groot Haesebroek after its purchase, Van der Leck was tasked with producing the color scheme for an art room in the residence, designed specifically for courses to be taught by Bremmer.[3] In his gouache design for the art room, Van der Leck chose an unusual method to represent the space (fig. 4.2). Rather than present a typical perspectival representation of the interior, he decided instead to depict the elevations of the four walls folded out and flattened onto the same plane as the floor of the room.

1. Hillhorst, "Bart van der Leck," 159–60 (see chap. 1, n. 17).

2. Nancy Troy summarized this early project, for which there are no surviving designs: "At Huize ten Vijfer, Van der Leck was responsible for making new color schemes for everything from walls and floors to tablecloths and even a heater. From his correspondence with Mrs. Kröller it is known that he used strong, bright colors, not exclusively primary but limited to an only slightly broader scale." Troy, *De Stijl Environment*, 12 (see chap. 2, n. 47).

3. Troy, *De Stijl Environment*, 13.

This method of architectural drawing has been critically studied and defined as the "developed surface interior" by the architectural historian Robin Evans.[4] Van der Leck's drawing method—the earliest example of a developed surface interior to be used by a De Stijl artist—was adopted at one time or another by nearly every member of the group to illustrate their efforts in interior design. In the literature on De Stijl, art historians have approached these drawings in two principal ways: first, as documentary materials, transparent accounts with which to reconstruct once-extant rooms now lost; and second, as evidence of De Stijl's formalist predilection for two-dimensionality, a strategy adopted in order to reconcile the group's work in the decorative arts with their endeavors in painting. Nancy Troy, for example, followed such lines in her analysis of these drawings, arguing that the artists of De Stijl used the developed surface interior because "it allowed them to avoid the distortion inherent in diminishing perspective views and to suppress any sense of architectural mass. The result is a planar vision of architecture that corresponds closely to De Stijl *easel painting*."[5]

Attention has yet to be given, however, to the significance inherent in the tradition, structure, and use of such a drafting method. In his critical study of the

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4. "In descriptive geometry, folding out of the adjacent surfaces of a three-dimensional body so that all its faces can be shown on a sheet of paper is called developing a surface, so we will call this kind of drawing . . . the *developed surface interior.*" Robin Evans, "The Developed Surface: An Enquiry in to the Brief Life of an Eighteenth-Century Drawing Technique," in *Translations from Drawing to Building and Other Essays* (London: Architectural Association Publications, 1997), 202. Nancy Troy referred to these drawings as "exploded-box plans" in her survey of De Stijl interiors (*De Stijl Environment*, 13). Laura Jacobus referred to them as "Laid-Out interiors"; see Laura Jacobus, "On 'Whether a Man Could See before Him and behind Him Both at Once': The Role of Drawing in the Design of Interior Space in England c. 1600–1800," *Architectural History* 31 (1988): 148–65.

5. Emphasis mine. See Troy, *De Stijl Environment*, 53. As will be discussed below, the developed surface interior itself creates distortions in the representation of the interior. What is of interest in this chapter is revealing the nature of the distortion inherent in the developed surface interior, and why it was so appealing to De Stijl artists, particularly during the early years of the movement.

developed surface interior, Evans argued that "architectural drawing affects what might be called the architect's field of visibility. It makes it possible to see some things more clearly by suppressing other things: something gained, something lost. . . . We have to understand architectural drawing as something that defines the things it transmits. It is not a neutral vehicle transporting conceptions into objects, but a medium that carries and distributes information in particular modes."[6]

The developed surface interior was not a neutral vessel for conveying De Stijl's notions of interior design. Rather, the method provided a formal and conceptual framework within which De Stijl artists could think through and challenge nineteenth-century trends in interior design, in order to construct a modern understanding of the built environment. I will argue that the hermetic nature of the interiors conceived by De Stijl artists and described through the developed surface interior shares a structural homology with what Michel Foucault has theorized as "heterotopic space." Derived from the Greek *heteros*, "another," and *topos*, "place," the term broadly refers to "various institutions and places that interrupt the apparent continuity and normality of ordinary everyday space."[7] These De Stijl interiors would serve as important liminal sites capable of initiating the conditioning of, and transition towards, a "new man" for the modern world. Color, and its rational implementation, was the principal tool with which they sought to differentiate these realized spaces from the fabric of the built environment in which they were enacted. It was for this reason, as I will demonstrate, that the developed surface interior was so frequently employed in the early years of the group, and only began to fade out of use as

6. Evans, "Developed Surface," 199.

De Stijl artists sought to expand from an interior, heterotopic space outward into the entire built environment.

Developing a Surface for the Interior

Van der Leck's adoption of the developed surface interior to convey his decorative scheme for the Kröller-Müllers' art room was an unusual decision for the time. All the more atypical was how often the drawing technique was employed by various members of De Stijl in the years following World War I. To my knowledge, during this period no other avant-garde movement involved in architectural or interior design employed the developed surface interior, or certainly not to the same extent as their Dutch peers.[8] Yet De Stijl's use of the drawing method for conceiving of and representing interior decorative schemes was not merely unique among the avant-garde, it was anachronistic during the opening decades of the twentieth century. In fact, the developed surface interior, which emerged in Great Britain in the mid-eighteenth century, had largely fallen

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7. Michiel Dehaene and Lieven De Cauter, "Introduction," in *Heterotopia and the City: Public Space in a Postcivil Society*, ed. Michiel Dehaene and Lieven De Cauter (London: Routledge, 2008), 3–4.

8. An exception was the work of designers such as Hinnerk Scheper (1897–1957), Heinrich Kok (1896–1934), and Alfred Arndt (1898–1976), all of whom were members of the Wall Painting Workshop at the Bauhaus. However, their use of the developed surface interior did not begin until the mid-1920s, and the drawing technique was often accompanied by other modes of architectural drafting. See Klaus-Jürgen Winkler, "The Workshop for Wall Painting at the Staatliches Bauhaus Weimar," in *Bauhaus Alben 3: The Weaving Workshop, The Wall-Painting Workshop, The Glass-Painting Workshop, The Bookbinding Workshop, The Stone-Carving Workshop*, ed. Klaus-Jürgen Winkler, trans. Steven Lindberg (Weimar: Bauhaus-Universität, 2008), 120–49; Lutz Schöbe, "Black and White or Color?," in *The Dessau Bauhaus Building: 1926–1999*, ed. Bauhaus Dessau Foundation, and Margret Kentgens-Craig (Basel: Birkhäuser, 1998), 42–65; Renate Scheper, *Colorful!: The Wallpainting Workshops at the Bauhaus* (Berlin: Bauhaus-Archiv, 2005); Barbara Happe and Martin S. Fischer, *Haus Auerbach: Of Walter Gropius with Adolf Meyer* (Tübingen: Wasmuth, 2003), 121–64. Additionally for an investigation of the Workshop see Morgan Ridler, "The Bauhaus Wall Painting Workshop: Mural Painting to Wallpapering, Art to Product" (PhD diss., Graduate Center, City University of New York, 2016). While outside the scope of this

out of favor among interior designers and architects since the opening years of the nineteenth. To understand the appeal of this outdated method of architectural representation for the artists of De Stijl, it is necessary to look into the origins of the technique and its place within the history of interior design.

The emergence of the developed surface interior around the middle of the eighteenth century in Great Britain marked a period of increased thought and attention given by architects and designers to the room.[9] It coincided with a turn away from the neo-Palladian ideals and aesthetics that had dominated British architecture during the second quarter of the century, exemplified by Chiswick House (1727–29), designed by Richard Boyle, Earl of Burlington (1694–1753).[10] In the design of such buildings during this period, greater aesthetic importance, and thus attention, was given to the appearance of the exterior than to the interior. As a result, in the design of such buildings plans and elevations were the principal drafting methods used to communicate the final appearance of an architectural project. Interiors were of secondary importance to these British architects, and were frequently depicted in section. Because of its limited representational scope, this method was capable only of depicting a single wall of a room, for example as in James Paine's *Section of Wardour Castle, Wiltshire, from South to North* (ca. 1768;

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project, the possible influence of Van Doesburg on the Wall Painting Workshop during his time in Weimar warrants further investigation.

9. Evans, "Developed Surface," 200–1.

10. This trend in decoration was spurred by the publication of several important texts, including *The Architecture of A. Palladio: In Four Books* (1715) translated by Giacomo Leoni, and *The Designs of Inigo Jones: Consisting of Plans and Elevations for Publick and Private Buildings* (1727) by William Kent, which revived interest in the architectural work of Inigo Jones (1573–1652). See Peter Thornton, *Form and Decoration: Innovation in the Decorative Arts, 1470–1870* (London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1988), 174–75.

fig. 4.3). The section merely exposed the interior, rather than articulating a complete impression of its decorative program.

Typically, these section views of the interior were drawn orthogonally. Laura Jacobus has noted that orthographic architectural drawing went hand in hand with this neoclassical tradition in Britain, as it allowed architects to represent their projects in a manner that was seen as proportional, mathematically derived, and therefore objective. "Such orthographic drawings," Jacobus wrote, "were diagrammatic rather than illusionistic in intention and thus plans, elevations and sections were based on the same conceptual approach to drawing—namely that the drawing shows what is known rather than what appears to the eye."[11] Robin Evans argued that the inclination toward such a mode of orthographic drawing—one that placed greatest emphasis on the exact and rational depiction of the building—was intrinsically linked to the hierarchical logic of the typical neo-Palladian floor plans executed by architects of the period such as the Earl of Burlington or James Gibbs (1682–1754). As Evans summarized, this arrangement consisted of "four radiating routes [that] can be plotted from the public salon in the center to the remote terminating closets in the wings; a fundamentally hierarchical arrangement, exactly and symmetrically graded from center to edge, from capacious grandeur to privileged seclusion, four times over."[12] A design for a home by Gibbs (fig. 4.4), reproduced in his *Book of Architecture* (1728), exemplifies this arrangement.[13] The purpose of each room, whether public or private, can be deduced from the radial

11. Jacobus, "On 'Whether a man Could See,'" 149–50.

12. Evans, "Developed Surface," 204.

13. James Gibbs, *A Book of Architecture Containing Designs of Buildings and Ornaments* (London, 1728). In his explanatory remarks accompanying each illustrative plate, Gibbs gives

hierarchy of the building's plan: a room's function was understood in relation to the whole. Because one's position with respect to the main salon informed the nature of the space he or she found him- or herself within, there was less need to marshal interior decoration to communicate or differentiate the nature or function of a given room within the residence.

Evans argued that this hierarchical and relational arrangement of private, aristocratic British homes began to change with shifting tastes around the mid-eighteenth century. The work of Robert Adam (1728–92) embodied this turn in British interior design. As Evans noted, in Adam's designs for notable projects, such as Syon House (1762), Luton Hoo (1767), and Saxham (1779; fig. 4.5), he abandoned the radial hierarchy for a circuited relationship of rooms.[14] According to Evans:

> There is little real difference between the relationship of the rooms, one to another, when they are circuited this way. . . . [Rooms] are, with scant regard to overall symmetry, made deliberately into a medley of unique and distinct shapes: square, oblong, apsidal, circular, oval, quatrefoil, cruciform, hexagonal or octagonal. They are now also distinguished by use: dining rooms, breakfast rooms, parlors, tea rooms, withdrawing rooms, card rooms, music rooms and picture galleries.[15]

As each room bore the responsibility of greater functional and social specialization, ornament began to play a more significant role in announcing the designated purpose of a room within the circuited layout of the home's interior. As a result, every room came to

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attention entirely to the external façade ornamentation of his designs, providing little consideration of the interior decoration of his buildings.

14. For a detailed review of many of these projects, see Jeremy Musson, *Robert Adam: Country House Design, Decoration and the Art of Elegance* (New York: Rizzoli, 2017).

be distinguished by a unique decorative program. Evans elaborated on this further, noting: "The increased variegation of usage and effect is the counterpoint to a transcending homogeneity of space. A concatenation of interiors of magnified individuality dispels any sense of latent sameness; each room is its own little empire of activity, allusion and color; each a totally encompassing enterprise."[16]

As the aristocratic British home became a constellation of independent interiors, each assigned its specific function and corresponding decoration, a new method of representation was required for the design of such spaces. At first, sections were fitted with greater details, articulating the style of wall hangings and décor of the rooms within a building. William Chambers (1723–96) produced one of the earliest examples of such an altered section for York House, Pall Mall in London in 1759 (fig. 4.6).[17] This method of architectural drawing remained limited, however, by its capacity to communicate only the effect of a single wall, rather than the entirety of the space itself. It was for this reason that the architect Isaac Ware (ca. 1707–66) argued, in *The Complete Body of Architecture* (1768), that the developed surface interior was crucial for those who wish to establish unified decorative programs for rooms within a building project:

> The architect may very frequently design an elegant side of a room, which yet may be improper for the place, or disagreeable to the rest of the ornaments. The remedy for this is to reduce no part into practice, till he has upon paper designed the whole together. . . . A room of the usual construction has four sides, or two

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15. This floor plan was not only typical of Adam's work, but is visible in contemporaneous projects by the likes of James Wyatt (1746–1813). See Evans, "Developed Surface," 206–7.

16. Evans, "Developed Surface," 207.

17. Evans noted that John Cornforth and John Fowler have argued that this section is one of the earliest in England to depict wall coverings and interior color schemes. See Evans, "Developed Surface," 202; John Cornforth and John Fowler, *English Interior Decoration in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Barrie and Jenkins, 1978), 217–18.

> sides and two ends; and it will disgust the eye if one side have ornaments, though ever so handsome, which do not correspond with those of the other. . . . The four sides of the room being laid down on paper, with the space or proportion of floor between, the figure represents at once to the eye the whole and its several parts. . . .[18]

This was the critical task that the developed surface interior performed: it enabled an architect or interior designer to arrange and represent a unified ornamental design for a given room, independent of its architectural context. Because the drawing method rejected any intimation of its architectural setting, it became crucial to designers overseeing the remodeling of already extant interior spaces to adapt them to the changing tastes of the British aristocracy.[19]

At the forefront of this shift in cultural production was the highly influential British architect and designer Robert Adam, who frequently adopted the developed surface interior in his numerous architectural and renovation projects from the 1750s through the 1780s. Following his return from Rome in 1758, Adam introduced his idiosyncratic interpretation of neoclassical ornamentation. Influenced by his observations of Etruscan wall painting and the Vatican Loggie, Adam turned away from the imposing

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18. Isaac Ware, "Of Suiting the Ornaments to One Another," in *The Complete Body of Architecture: Adorned with Plans and Elevations from Original Designs, in which are Interspersed some Designs of Inigo Jones, never before Published* (London: T. Osborne and J. Shipton, 1768), 477–78. The book comprised a collection of essays, and was reissued two years after his death. While Ware wrote about the use of the developed surface interior by architects, Jacobus noted that the earliest employment of the drawing technique came from different professions. "Drawing concerned with the arrangement of uprights appear, not in the work of professional architects, but in the work of those on the fringes of the profession; amateurs, wall-painters and craftsmen in wood." Jacobus, "On 'Whether a man Could See,'" 153. Many of the surviving examples of the developed surface interior appear in pattern books issued by upholsterers and furniture makers.

19. Eileen Harris, *The Genius of Robert Adam: His Interiors* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 4–5.

three-dimensional neoclassical sculpture and stucco work, reserved monochromatic palettes, and heavy coverings still favored in Britain. Instead, he popularized the widespread use of color, as well as two-dimensional grotesque and arabesque ornamentation which softened the effects of neoclassical decorative schemes (fig. 4.7).[20] Flatness became an important aesthetic element in Adam's designs, as architectural features such as coffered ceilings were replaced with illusionist patterning. Adam coupled his lighter decorative program with furnishings produced by the likes of Thomas Chippendale (1718–79). Chippendale's designs contrasted drastically from the bulky and abundantly ornate form of earlier furniture design. Instead, his furniture was delicately carved, light, and as a result more mobile. The production of such lightweight furniture coincided with an evolving practice of furniture placement. When a room was not in use, furniture would be arranged along the periphery of the space against the walls. As a result, the furniture of a room grew increasingly integrated with the decoration of the wall, often aligning in height with the dado, or painted to match the wall's decorative motifs.[21] The centrifugal nature of late-eighteenth-century British interior design aligned perfectly with the two-dimensionality of the developed surface interior's method of representation. Devoid of perspectival recession, the drawing technique was forced to evacuate the center of the room. This space became limited to the illustration of carpets or flooring, forcing all of the room's furniture to be articulated on the surface of the out laid walls. Evans summarized the situation as follows: "During the last three decades of

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20. Thornton, *Form and Decoration,* 4. William Kent (1685–1748)—a painter and decorator-turned-architect—was an important precursor to Adam's practice, creating colorful interior designs in neoclassical grotesque motifs for the Presence Chamber at Kensington Palace (1724) in London. He was one of the earliest architects to utilize the developed surface interior. See John Cornforth, *Early Georgian Interiors* (New Haven:, Yale University Press, 2004), 135–50.

21. Evans, "Developed Surface," 214.

the eighteenth century, a brief equilibrium was achieved between house planning, the method of representing interiors, and the distribution of furniture. . . . They simply belonged together, each lending stability, value or intensity to the rest."[22]

Yet it was exactly this interrelationship between plan, decoration, function, and representation that led to the developed surface interior's decline by the opening years of the nineteenth century. Designers such as Humphrey Repton (1752–1818) looked to upend the remaining vestiges of social and structural hierarchy still maintained in the various circuited plans of the past half century. In his important book *Fragments on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening* (1816), Repton took direct aim at the single-use rooms of the late eighteenth century, and their peripheral arrangement of furniture. Advocating against the "Cedar Parlor," [23] he argued, in a poetic verse which accompanied two illustrations of modern living rooms (figs. 4.8a, b):

> No more the *Cedar Parlor's* formal gloom
>
> With dullness chills, 'tis now the *Living Room*;
>
> Where guests, to whim, or taste, or fancy true,
>
> Scatter'd in groups, their different plans pursue.[24]

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22. Evans, "Developed Surface," 214.

23. Commenting on Repton's reconceptualization of interior design, Mark Girouard wrote: "There was no need for him to expand on [the Cedar Parlor] in his verses, for everyone knew what he was getting at. It was what society called the 'circle'; and is silently but eloquently expressed in his drawing by a circle of empty chairs, just abandoned by their occupants, who have been indulging in general conversation as their ancestors had been doing since at least the seventeenth century." Mark Girouard, *Life in the English Country House: A Social and Architectural History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978), 238.

24. Humphrey Repton, *Fragments on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening* (London: T. Bensley and Son, 1816), 58.

Mark Girouard has noted that the reference to "Scatter'd in groups" was the crucial phrase in Repton's prose: "Everyday social life was no longer a kind of round game, in which everyone joined in together. Different people could now do different things at the same time and even in the same room. They could drift together and separate, form groups and break them up, in an easy informal way."[25] The modern living room, as illustrated by Repton, was no longer unified by a singular purpose, and thus no longer in need of a unified decorative scheme to enunciate it.[26] In the nineteenth century, this brought about the flexibility for greater eclecticism in ornamentation. Additionally, the call for a variety of pastimes within the room subsequently transformed the design of the room itself. To fulfill these different tasks, furniture accumulated, not along the wall as it used to, but in the center of the room. Two images of the drawing room at Syon House in London, designed by Adam, illustrate this point (fig. 4.9a, 4.9b). The first, a photograph taken around 1900, depicts the interior as it was adapted to suit the developing tastes of the nineteenth century. Various islands of heavy and ornate furniture, all designated for differing occupations within the room, crowd into the center of the space. The second is a photograph taken following the restoration of the room to its original condition. The historically accurate furniture—lighter and meant to complement the wall ornamentation—is pushed to the periphery of the space.[27]

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25. Girouard, *English Country House,* 238.

26. Evans summarized this transformation in the following terms: "The variety achieved in the serial organization of different rooms was to be matched by a microcosm of variety in each room. In order for this to take place, the purely *geometric* correspondence between rings of rooms and rings of walls would have to be done away with. . . . In one instance (the plan) the ring was the agency for variation; in another (the room), the agency for unification. So the *geometry* of the ring was supplanted by the *logic* of variety; an idea about social intercourse took over from a configuration as the key theme." Evans, "Developed Surface," 215.

27. Harris, *Genius of Robert Adam*, 75.

This shift in the occupational use of rooms, and the decorative schemes that adapted to meet those demands, led to the downfall of the developed surface interior. The drawing technique's two-dimensional nature was ill suited to representing the wide array of furniture pieces occupying the middle of the floor. Further, its propensity to unify decorative programs waned in importance as eclecticism became aesthetically preferable.[28] Variations on the developed surface interior which tried to negotiate the technique's limitations remained well into the nineteenth century. The furniture business Gillow and Company presented clients with developed surface interiors that blended flattened, topographic renderings of wall decorations with awkwardly represented pieces of furniture illustrated in perspective in the center of the floor (fig. 4.10). By the middle of the nineteenth century, however, two-point perspective renderings that articulated the illusionistic environment of various furnishings and decorative programs came to dominate the representation of interior designs. As Evans noted, "The demise of the developed surface, complete by 1820, was the demise also of a way of making interiors. Its disappearance coincided not only with a change in the way rooms were occupied, but with a change in the prevailing conception of architectural space."[29]

The Surface and the Seam

The source of Van der Leck's discovery of the developed surface interior is uncertain. Although it had largely fallen out of favor during the nineteenth century, as Evans described, the method of architectural drawing had not entirely disappeared. It is possible

28. Anca Lasc has outlined the nature of decorating in the nineteenth century, arguing that while eclectic, such interior decorating programs were carefully orchestrated. See Anca Lasc, "Interior Decorating in the Age of Historicism: Popular Advice Manuals and the Pattern Books of Édouard Bajot," *Journal of Design History* 26, no. 1 (2013): 1–24.

that while studying wall painting at the Quellinus School in Amsterdam, Van der Leck may have come across examples of developed surface interiors.[30] More likely, the artist would have been introduced to the method by Berlage. He had followed the elder architect's work as a student, during which time the Amsterdam Stock Exchange was under construction. In 1905, he had gone so far as to dedicate an essay to Berlage.[31] Before designing the art room at Villa Groot Haesebroek, while under the employment of the Kröller-Müllers, Van der Leck had come to work closely under Berlage, although in a restricted capacity, as a color consultant for certain aspects of several projects. These included tile mosaics for the De Schipborg farm (1914; fig. 4.11); color schemes for the glazed tile sheathing and ornamental ceilings of Holland House, London (1914; fig. 4.12); and the color schemes for the hunting lodge Sint Hubertus (1914–20).[32] Berlage was familiar with the developed surface interior and had employed the method to represent several of his interior designs, such as for a meeting room at the 1910 World Fair in Brussels (fig. 4.13), as well as for the tea and smoking rooms of Sint Hubertus (1915–16; fig. 4.14a 4.14b).[33] The drawings for the hunting lodge are particularly

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29. Evans, "Developed Surface," 223.

30. Hillhorst, "Bart van der Leck," 154 (see n. 1 above). There are examples of Dutch decorators using the technique. For example, the architect and theoriest Jacob Otten Huslij (1738–1796) likely learned the method while working in the studio of his uncles Hans Jacob (1702–76) and Hendrik Huslij (1706–88), both practicing stuccoists. See Reinier Baarsen, ed., *Rococo in Nederland* (Amsterdam: Rijksmuseum, 2001), 130–31.

31. Bart van der Leck, "Eene inleiding tot het glasschilderen aan den Amsterdamschen Beursbouwmeester H. P. Berlage" [An introduction to glass painting: dedicated to the Amsterdam architect, H. P. Berlage], reproduced in Toos van Kooten, *Bart van der Leck* (Otterlo, Netherlands: Kröller-Müller Museum, 1994), 170–75. While the essay was not published, Van der Leck sent Berlage a draft of his text along with several drawings. Critical of the material he was sent, Berlage noted that Van der Leck had not achieved the stated mission articulated in his essay, to break with previous styles. See Troy, *De Stijl Environment*, 11–12 (see chap. 2, n. 47).

32. For a detailed review of the projects on which Van der Leck and Berlage worked, see Sergio Polano, *Hendrik Petrus Berlage: Complete Works* (New York: Rizzoli, 1988) 215–19.

33. Polano, *Hendrik Petrus Berlage*, 197.

complex. Because the two rooms for which Berlage produced the designs were semicircular, the curved outer wall had to be represented in two dimensions. Berlage accomplished this by depicting one wall as simultaneously surface and section. Subtly implied, the curve of the wall is meant to be read as bending and projecting out toward the surface plane of the sheet, which in turn truncates it, leaving a section of the outer wall visible. The marshaling of such variations on the developed surface interior demonstrates Berlage's strong grasp of the drawing method.

Van der Leck's design for the art room (fig. 4.2), however, displayed less familiarity with the technique. Notably, he depicted the bottom wall upside down from its actual position in space. This decision was likely an attempt to orient the interior around a single perspective, presumably with the aim of making the rendering more legible. This rotation of the lower wall, however, undercuts the vital function of the radial orientation of all the walls in such a plan: to allow the design to be conceived virtually as the mental folding-up of all four walls into a box, and the subsequent projection of oneself into the space. It needs to be emphasized that up to this point Van der Leck's role in the creation of color schemes for the projects commissioned by the Kröller-Müllers, and the leeway given to him in that role, was quite limited. In fact, he only received the commission for the design of an entire room after articulating directly to Helene Kröller-Müller his dissatisfaction with the limitations Berlage had placed on him during previous projects. He wrote: "And now I would like to suggest, . . . if you permit, that I no longer do this kind of work, i.e., paint old houses. If it involved a modern work, or a room in which something specific needs doing, then I would be glad to do it, but to be this kind of

master house painter—I have absolutely no desire for it."[34] Hence Van der Leck's design for the art room was one of his earliest independent attempts to create a unified color scheme, and thus likely his first attempt at rendering a developed surface interior.

In spite of his lack of familiarity with the developed surface interior, Van der Leck's decision to use the method to conceive of a color scheme for the art room was driven by a set of characteristics similar to those that had brought Adam to the technique a century and a half earlier. Principally, the developed surface interior proved extremely useful in the renovation of a specific space within an already existing building.[35] The nature of the drawing method—the display of only the surfaces of the floor, four walls, and on occasion the ceiling of a given room—was inward-turning, focusing all emphasis on the interior while providing little, if any, information regarding the context in which that room existed.[36] The self-contained effect of the developed surface interior would have facilitated Van der Leck's attempt to conceive a unified decorative scheme for the space, organized around a color palette of white, black, and the primary colors red and blue (a palette with which he was experimenting in his paintings of that year as well). While Van der Leck's use of pure color applied directly onto the wall was progressive, structurally his decorative scheme retained the traditional segmentation of the wall derived from the morphological forms of classical architectural façades.[37] For example, the bases of the room's walls were all to be painted with a black skirting. The fillings

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34. The quote was printed in Rudolf Oxenaar, "Bart van der Leck tot 1920: Een primitief van de nieuwe tijd" [Bart van der Leck until 1920: A primitive of the new era] (PhD diss., Rijksuniversiteit Utrecht, 1976), 100. Qouted and translated in Troy, *De Stijl Environment*, 12.

35. Harris, *Genius of Robert Adam*, 4–5. See also Cornforth, *Early Georgian Interiors*, 8.

36. Evans, "Developed Surface," 203.

37. See Stefan Muthesius, *The Poetic Home: Designing the 19th Century Domestic Interior* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2009), 143.

above were white, framed on each wall by a narrow band of black. This band served to emphasize the boundary between the white filling from the narrow band of blue that marked the picture rail above. Tracing the corner of each wall, the black band also demarcated the boundary between them, thus emphasizing their independence from one another. A frieze of red rectangles framed in white completed the decoration of the walls. Black was to be applied to the interior of the three large display cabinets designed by Berlage, which were intended to exhibit artifacts and books owned by Helene Kröller-Müller. In the center of the room, a rug of black surrounded by bands of red and blue was intended to be placed on a white carpet that would span the entire floor. For the table and chairs designed by Berlage which occupy this carpeted space (fig. 4.15), Van der Leck also conceived of a white tablecloth and blue chair coverings, in order to lighten the imposing presence of the heavy teak furniture.[38]

With the art room, Van der Leck was afforded greater agency to realize his vision of "monumentality," the term he used to designate the stylistic unification of the built environment.[39] Yet even with this newly awarded independence, his design remained inhibited by Berlage's presence. For the renovation of the art room, the architect was in charge of designing the architectural details of the interior, as well as the furniture for the space, as noted above.[40] The cabinets, table, and chairs Berlage created for the room were large and imposing. This may be another reason why the developed surface interior would have appealed to Van der Leck, as it collapses furniture, and its imposition into the

38. Troy, *De Stijl Environment*, 13.

39. Michael White has written extensively about the role the notion of "monumentality" played in the theoretical discourse of De Stijl. He equates Van der Leck's use of the term with *gemeenschapskunst*. On White's discussion of *gemeenschapskunst* and monumentality, see White, *De Stijl and Dutch Modernism*, 1–11 (see chap. 1, n. 25).

space, into two dimensions. In Van der Leck's design for the art room, the large vitrines are pressed into flattened forms, their depth articulated only through their footprint outlined in brown on the floor. In addition, Berlage's table and chairs are excluded from the center of the floor, shown only in the compressed space of the lower wall elevation of the room. Despite these efforts, the imposition of Berlage's designs became too much for Van der Leck, who in protest abruptly left a design meeting with the architect and the firm contracted to execute the project.[41] In a stark defense of his position, he wrote to Helene Kröller-Müller:

> I have repeatedly said to myself, Mrs. Kröller has a feeling for this living monumentality; and this letter can contribute to strengthening this feeling in order to achieve a higher degree of purity; to remove all the inhibiting elements, particularly those of a dilettante nature, so as to arrive at an organic living creation of our time. . . . This work now seems suitable to me for architecture, although I can understand that the architect of the previous generation will protest against it. As long as the architect continues to cling to his high priesthood, and his clerical guidance is not replaced by a wider insight—the contrast of building and painting and hence sees no limits—he himself will try to make something for all kinds of arts which is dilettante-ish with respect to his architectural insight, and he will naturally reconcile himself to this because it then remains secondary to his architecture. As soon as a more modern insight has grown up in which all the arts are of equal value, however, this principle, with its consequences, will influence the attitude of the arts in architecture. . . . The renewal of painting starts at the treatment of the plane which the architect creates.[42]

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40. Troy, *De Stijl Environment*, 13.

41. Janssen and White, *The Story of De Stijl,* 24 (see chap. 1, n. 4).

42. Letter dated December 18, 1916 from Bart van der Leck to Helene Kröller-Muller, trans. in R. W. D. Oxenaar, et al., *Kröller-Müller: The First Hundred Years* (Haarlem: Joh. Enschedé, 1989), 35.

Van der Leck would break off his contract to complete the color schemes for the art room shortly after writing this letter. The language he employed, however, in his biting criticism of Berlage would serve as the foundation for one of the most significant early treatises in the development of De Stijl's theoretical platform.

Published in the first issue of *De Stijl*, Van der Leck's essay "The Place of Modern Painting in Architecture" took aim at architects of the previous generation affiliated with the pan-European movement of Art Nouveau—such as Henry van de Velde and to a lesser extent Berlage—who, inspired by the writing and works of Richard Wagner, had sought to create *Gesamtkunstwerken* under the aegis of the lone architect-genius.[43] In place of the solitary architect, Van der Leck argued for a collaborative relationship between architect and painter. At the core of his collaborative model was the belief that painting and architecture had developed independent of one another, with divergent ontological aims—the former rooted in the nature of color, and the latter on the

43. "We ask the architect for 'self-restraint' because he has so much in his hands that in essence does not really belong to architecture, and in its execution, must be understood entirely differently from the manner that the architect understands it" (Wij vragen van den architect "zelfbeperking," omdat deze zooveel in handen heft, wat in wezen niet tot bouwkunst behoort, en in doorvoering geheel anders moet worden begrepen, dan de architect dat doet; my translation). Bart van der Leck, "De Plaats van het Moderne Schilderen in de Architectuur," *De Stijl* 1, no. 1 (October 1917), 6–7. Amy Ogata provides a critical review of the influential role Belgian Art Nouveau played in a pan-European discourse on modern design and architecture; see Amy Ogata, *Art Nouveau and the Social Vision of Modern Living: Belgian Artists in a European Context* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001). Although he often worked in collaboration with mural painters in an effort toward *gemeenschapskunst*, for example with the Amsterdam Stock Exchange, Berlage directed his architectural projects with great scrutiny and control. See Whyte and De Wit, *Hendrik Petrus Berlage*, 53–54 (see chap. 1, n. 43). In targeting Berlage, Van der Leck engaged in the typical De Stijl practice of entrenching ideological positions based on personal animus—a favorite strategy of Van Doesburg's.

delineation of space.[44] To demonstrate this, Van der Leck charted how painting differed from or altered architecture in five ways:

> 1. Modern painting is the destruction of natural plastic expression, in contrast to the natural plastic construction of architecture.
>
> 2. Modern painting is open, in contrast to the binding, closed nature of architecture.
>
> 3. Modern painting is color and the definition of space, in contrast to the colorless planarity of architecture.
>
> 4. Modern painting is the plastic expression in spatial flatness: extension, in contrast to the space-restricting flatness of architecture.
>
> 5. Modern painting is plastic balance, in contrast to the constructive balance (load and support) of architecture.[45]

Van der Leck's essay established a *paragone* debate between architect and painter which art historians would use to categorize, and thus conceptualize, De Stijl's members and their theoretical positions.[46] A rift between these two factions did exist among De Stijl

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44. "Architecture constructs, creates organic corporeality in closed relationships. The architectural plane is the delimitation of light and space. In modern painting, color is the plastic expression of light; primary color is the direct plastic expression of light" (Licht- en ruimte-begrenzing is het bouwkundig vlak. In de modern schilderkunst is kleur: beelding van licht, primaire kleur: directe beelding van licht.) Van der Leck, "De Plaats van het Moderne Schilderen," 7.

45. "1e. De modern schilderkunst is destructive van het plastisch natuurlijke tegenover het plastisch-natuurlijk constructieve van de bouwkunst. 2e. De modern schilderkunst is open tegenover het verbindende, gesloten van de bouwkunst. 3e. De modern schilderkunst is kleur en ruimtegevend tegenover het kleurloos-vlakke van de bouwkunst. 4e. De modern schilderkunst is beelding in ruimtelijke vlakheid: uitbreiding, tegenover de ruimtebeperkende vlakheid van de bouwkunst. 5e. De modern schilderkunst is beeldend-evenwichtig, tegenover het contructief evenwichtig (steun en last) van de bouwkunst." Van der Leck, "De Plaats van het Moderne Schilderen," 6–7.

46. Most notably, this came to serve as the model for Nancy Troy's important thesis, which argued that De Stijl could be best understood as a collaborative process, specifically between

members—the inclusion of architects in the group was the principal reason for Van der Leck's refusal to sign its manifesto in 1918. However, I would like to suggest that when Van der Leck, and later Van Doesburg and Huszar, spoke of painting in architecture, they did so in a wide-reaching sense that extended beyond the canvas or wall to the application of color broadly to any surface in the built environment. The language with which they spoke about "painting" in architecture, while inflected through their knowledge of trends in avant-garde painting, echoed similar discursive patterns that permeated interior design, in which designers would marshal tropes derived from painting to either theorize color in the interior or articulate the application of chromatic elements in their projects.[47] Furthermore, this tension between De Stijl artists and architects mirrors that which had long existed between the practitioners of interior design and those of architecture to which such designs were confined.[48]

Van der Leck returned to the developed surface interior shortly after the publication of his essay in *De Stijl*. His design for a room in 1918 (fig. 4.16) can be read as a visual manifesto of the ideas he put forward in his essay on the relationship between architecture and the chromatic interior. The room was for De Leeuwerik (Skylark), the Laren home of his neighbor, J. de Leeuw.[49] The commission came with fewer restrictions than that of the Kröller-Müller project. De Leeuw gave Van der Leck complete control over the color scheme for a space that was free of the kind of imposing architectural

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painter and architect, as exemplified by their projects in interior design. See Troy, *De Stijl Environment*, 2–7.

47. See for example Musson, *Robert Adam: Country House Design*, 21–22.

48. This divide between architect and interior designer is often visualized through the differing forms of drawing methods employed to present their projects, which as Evans noted (see above) convey different fields of visibility.

details at the Kröller-Müller home. Additionally, the furniture in the room was much less cumbersome than that designed by Berlage in the previous project, affording Van Der Leck greater control over the space.[50] The watercolor drawing completed for the project was more refined than his gouache design for the earlier art room, as he used a straightedge to square off the drawing. Additionally, Van der Leck no longer attempted to orient the interior by depicting one elevation upside down. Now all of the walls spread radially out from the center, allowing the room to be viewable from any side of the sheet.

The design's flatness emerged as paramount in Van der Leck's conception of the room. As Robin Evans observed, "Like the conventional section the developed surface interior is a three-dimensional organization reduced to two-dimensional drawing, but it is much less easy to restore apparent depth, because while the section merely compresses space, the developed surface also fractures space and destroys its continuity."[51] The destructive nature of the developed surface interior, however, not only affected the continuity of the architectural space it displayed. The flattened nature of the design also destroys the continuity of the load and support dynamic of the architectural superstructure in which it exists—an effect that was of foremost interest to Van der Leck. Drawing on the aesthetics of Arthur Schopenhauer (1788–1860), one of the artist's principal arguments in "On the Place of Painting in Architecture" was the need for color to function destructively within a building. In his use of the term "destruction," Van der Leck sought to convey the chromatic opening up, and thus elimination, of architecture's

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49. The small town had come to be a haven for artists and poets in the Netherlands. Troy, *De Stijl Environment*, 31.

50. Troy, *De Stijl Environment*, 34.

51. Evans, "Developed Surface," 203.

submission to the natural force of gravity, to allow the practice to transcend its utilitarian limitations and enter the higher realm of aesthetics.[52]

Ironically, Van der Leck's own understanding of this position was rooted in the ideas of Gottfried Semper, as mediated through Berlage. As discussed in chapter 3, Semper argued that the origins of architecture lay in the woven enclosures of ephemeral structures, such as the prehistoric tent, in which space is articulated through the free movement of surfaces, rather than the structure of load and support characteristic of the Vitruvian hut. With his principle of *Bekleidung*, Semper had asserted the inherited connection between the hanging textiles that constituted the boundaries of these structures and the wall, the emergence of which only occurred when structures required greater support.[53] Stemming from this anthropological understanding of the wall's origin, he argued that the wall existed in a suspended dualism between structure (*Kernform*) and surface (*Kunstform*).[54] For Semper, these two elements could be unified through the dematerialization of the wall by the application of color, returning it to an equilibrium historically attained by its progenitor, the hanging textile. It is in this sense that the developed surface interior once again would have appealed to Van der Leck's conceptualization of the chromatic interior, for as Laura Jacobus wrote, the drawing technique relied on the principle "that the corners of any room are like *seams* which can

52. Schopenhauer discussed the low status of architecture among the arts this way: "For architecture, considered only as fine art, the Ideas of the lowest grades of nature, that is, gravity, rigidity, and cohesion, are the proper theme, but not, as has been assumed hitherto, merely regular form, proportion, and symmetry. These are something purely geometrical, properties of space, not Ideas; therefore they cannot be the theme of a fine art." Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, vol. 2, trans. E. F. J. Payne (New York: Dover, 1958), 414.

53. See Gottfried Semper, "Der Stil in den technischen und tektonischen Künsten" [Style in the technical and tectonic arts] (1860–63), trans. in Mallgrave and Robinson, *Gottfried Semper*, 248 (see chap. 2, n. 20).

be ironed-out or unpicked in such a way that all sides of the room can be viewed flattened into a single plane."[55] Jacobus's marshaling of the seam as a metaphor for the functional principle of the developed surface interior mirrored the language employed by Semper, who dedicated several sections of his treatise *Der Stil* to the topic, writing:

> The seam is an expedient that was invented to join pieces of a homogeneous nature—namely, surfaces—into a whole. Originally used in clothing and coverings, it has through an *ancient association of ideas* and even through *linguistic usage* become the universal analogy and symbol for any *joining of originally discrete surfaces* in a tight connection. A most important and prime axiom for artistic practice is most simply, most originally, and at the same time most cogently expressed in the seam—*the principle of making virtue out of necessity*.[56]

The developed surface interior operates in such a way as to require, in order to virtually conceive of the represented space in three dimensions, that all the walls of a room, as they are laid out flat onto the surface, be restitched at their seams in into a unified whole.

In fact, Van der Leck's developed surface interior for the room in De Leeuwerik, while frequently discussed in relation to his paintings, operates according to a certain logic that appeals as much, if not more, to that of fabric instead of canvas. It is a space that seems frocked rather than stretched.[57] The abundance of white in this room, as Mark

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54. Semper, *Der Stil*, 379.

55. Emphasis mine. Laura Jacobus, "On 'Whether a Man Could See,'"153.

56. Semper, *Der Stil*, 152–54.

57. See for example Hillhorst, "Bart van der Leck," 177; Troy, *De Stijl Environment*, 31–32. As both art historians note, several compositions in paintings that Van der Leck completed in 1918 appear as decorative elements in the interior design, such as those on the door curtain or the tablecloth. The fluidity that Van der Leck saw in the boundaries between painting and the applied arts complicates the often-implied directionality of his creative process, that is from painting to design. Greater pause should be taken when characterizing him and his polemics as entirely about painting on canvas, to open the possibility of viewing his paintings through a decorative lens.

Wigley has argued, does not function as a neutral background, but rather plays a critical role in Van der Leck's design, draping the entire room in a unifying aesthetic field.[58] This is evident, for example, on the left and right walls of the space: the former containing the door to the room, and the latter a large window. Both thresholds are sealed by heavy, white curtains, preventing breaks in the planarity of the walls in the drawing. Wall and drapery become a single surface. This is reinforced by the repetition of a pattern that appears on three of the four walls, consisting of a diamond form, either red or blue, surrounded by three rectilinear forms, two just above and one below. On the wall with the window, the pattern is not interrupted by the gap created by the window; rather, it is continued on the fabric of the curtain, completing the arrangement.[59]

Additionally, with his removal of the black skirting and trim that were present in his color scheme for the art room, Van der Leck erased the boundaries not only between the walls of the room in De Leeuwerik, but also between the walls and the floor, further integrating it with the four walls of the space. Here again, textile plays a crucial role. The artist designed a large carpet containing seven geometric forms, echoing those on the wall, to cover the entire floor. Van der Leck displayed a keen interest in textile production in 1918, producing several carpet designs contemporaneous with his drawing

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58. Wigley asserted the agency of the white of modernist architecture, which historically and theoretically had been discussed as a neutral agent, and refuted the neutrality of white walls and their association with the cleansing of architecture of all ornamentation and ephemeral fashion. Rather, drawing upon the writings of Semper and Alois Riegl, Wigley explored the importance textiles and fashion played in the discourse surrounding modern architecture, positing that it was not a cleansing, but merely a fashion in and of itself. See Mark Wigley, *White Walls, Designer Dresses: The Fashioning of Modern Architecture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001).

59. Employing a strategy of alternating colors similar to that which Van Doesburg used for many of his patterned ornaments, Van der Leck varies the colors in these geometric shapes to create a sense of rhythm. The only variation in the pattern occurs on the curtained wall, in which a blue rectilinear form is set on an oblique, rather than aligned orthogonally with the wall as its red

for the room in De Leeuwerik (fig. 4.17). Finally, Van der Leck produced two coverings for the tables in the room, in an attempt to lessen the imposition of the furniture into the space. Curiously, the tablecloth—visible in a drawing in the upper right of the sheet—not only contained a pattern intended for the table's surface, but also included small red squares on the corners of the fabric; when the cloth was positioned at a forty-five-degree angle to the top of the table, these would hang off the edges and be visible from the sides. Shrouding the tables in this way would reduce their physical presence in the room, visually integrating the pieces with the surrounding decorative scheme.[60] The final effect of the room, facilitated by the format of the developed surface interior, was an aesthetically unified whole which existed independently, stitched up and sealed off from the surrounding building within which Van der Leck was commissioned to work.

Developed Surface/Heterotopic Space: The De Stijl Environment

Around the time that Van der Leck was completing his design for the room in De Leeuwerik, Van Doesburg was commissioned to produce color schemes for the home of Bart de Ligt (1883–1938) in Lage Vuursche, a small town to the south of Hilversum. De Ligt, a former clergyman, emerged in the years after the war as a leading left-wing intellectual in the Netherlands. He was an ardent pacifist and helped found the Union of Revolutionary Socialist Intellectuals (*Bond van Revolutionair-Socialistische Intellectuelen*) in October 1919.[61] He firmly believed that the environment in which one

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counterpart is on the opposite wall. This was likely the result of the reduced space afforded by the smaller area of the curtain.

60. A similar process appears in the two low, rectangular cabinets on whose front surfaces Van der Leck intended to apply a pattern.

61. Evert van Straaten, *Theo van Doesburg: Painter and Architect* (The Hague: SDU Publishers, 1988), 64.

existed could affect one's intellectual and social behavior.[62] As a result, when De Ligt purchased a new home after his recent marriage, he sought out a progressive architect to oversee the remodeling of the building, eventually contracting Robert van 't Hoff to complete the project. De Ligt was moved by Van Doesburg's decorative program for De Vonk (1917; fig. 4.35), a weekend house for working women built by J. J. P. Oud. Following his visit there, he requested that Van 't Hoff employ the artist to execute color schemes for the home.[63] According to a letter Van Doesburg wrote to the writer Antony Kok, his commission included the design of color schemes for six rooms and a corridor in the building, all of which were realized.[64] The rooms, however, are no longer intact, and all that remains of Van Doesburg's designs for the project is a single developed surface interior of the conservatory (fig. 4.18).

The commission for the De Ligt home marked a dramatic shift in Van Doesburg's conception of color in the interior. Before the De Ligt project, his most substantial endeavor to bring color into the interior was for the home of the notary Jan de Lange in Alkmaar. The building, designed by Jan Wils, was heavily indebted to the architecture of

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62. Alied Ottevanger, "A Painting in 3 Dim," *The Rijksmuseum Bulletin* 65, no. 2 (2017): 170.

63. Van Straaten, *Theo van Doesburg*, 64.

64. "I have been very busy with my practical work: projects for Oud, for Wils, and for Rev. de Ligt. The latter is a new and beautiful revelation in my life, and for whom it is a true delight to work. I was commissioned to completely clear up a cottage that he is going to live in Vuursche. For 14 days I have worked out six rooms and a corridor. The last time that I was there, the implementation of the designs had already begun, and it was touching to see how pleased he was with my color solution. The whole gave him the impression of a "heroic attitude of the mind" (Met mijn practische werk heb ik het eer druk: ben voor Oud beig, voor Wils en voor Ds de Ligt. Deze laatste is een nieuwe en schooner openbaring in mijn leven geworden voor wien te werken het een waar genot is. Ik kreeg opdacht een landhuisje dat hij op de Vuursche bewonen gaat geheel in kleur op te lossen. In 14 dagen tijd heb ik door aan een stuk door te werken 6 vertrekken en gan uitgewerkt. Den laatsten keer dat ik er was en er reeds met de uitvoering begonnen was was het aandoenlijk zijn geluk over mijn kleur-oplossing te aanschouwen. Het geheel maakte op hem den indruk van een "heroïschen geesteschouding."). Letter from Van Doesburg to Antony

Frank Lloyd Wright. Although given a greater amount of autonomy than afforded by Oud at De Vonk to apply color to the various elements of the interior, Van Doesburg found himself in a similar position to that of Van der Leck at Groot Haesebroek. He remained forced to negotiate the extensive architectural details and built-in furniture pieces Wils had designed for the home (fig. 4.19a, 4.19b). Though no designs remain, Van Doesburg described the project, which he called "das colorierte Haus," in detail to Kok:

> I have also devised a color scheme for the entire building, which was quite an undertaking. Alkmaar is in revolt! You can imagine how everyone stood watching. They don't understand any of it, but dare not go against it. In order to give you an idea of my concept, I would say that I began with the notion that all surfaces must be set *free* by an opposing light color. The door panels in dark blue, for example, are set free by white. From this arises a scintillating play of color, and because the cupboards, sideboards, and washstands, etc. are all built-in, I was able to create paintings everywhere, without form or anything of that kind.[65]

In the De Lange project, Van Doesburg was searching for a similar path, to dissolve the many architectonic elements of the building in order to enable the aesthetic transformation of the architectural space. He did so by advocating for the delineation of darker colors by lighter ones, such as white, in order for them to be "set free."

Kok, December 8, 1918; in Ottevanger, *De Stijl overall absolute leiding,* 254–55 (see chap. 1, n. 16).

65. "Ook heb ik in het geheel gebouw de kleuren aangegeven, wat een heel werk was. Alkmaar revolteert! Je begrijpt hoe de lui stonden te kijken. Ze begrijpen er niemendal van, maar durven er toch niet tegen in gaan. Om je een voorstelling te geven van mijn opvatting zeg ik dat ik ben uitgegaan van het begrip dat alle vlakke *los* moeten worden gemaakt door een tegenstellende lichte kleur. De deurpaneelen b.v. diep blauw, los gemaakt door wit. Hierdoor ontstaat een tintelende speling van kleuren en daar kasten, buffetten en waschtafels, enz. In het huis gebouwd zijn was ik in de gelegenheid overall schilderijen te scheppen, zonder vorm of wat ook. Het zal benieuwen of alles wordt uitgevoerd zooals ik heb aangegeven." Letter from Van Doesburg to Antony Kok, September 9, 1917; in Ottervanger, *De Stijl overall absolute leiding,* 205–6.

Van Doesburg quickly adopted Van der Leck's position on the "destructive" function of color in architecture. He demonstrated this early theoretical debt to his colleague in the 1918 essay "Notes on Monumental Art," published in *De Stijl*.[66] The essay was an important treatise, in which he used De Vonk as a seminal example of his stated positions. In "Notes on Monumental Art," he called for "counter-gravitational effects" to be enacted by "an aesthetic spatial effect created through destruction," which he called "painting-in-architecture."[67] In terms nearly identical to those of Van der Leck, he wrote: "The architect also occupied the place of painter and sculptor, which naturally had to lead to the most arbitrary results . . . . Architecture produces constructive, thus *closed* relief. In this way it is in neutral opposition to painting, which produces *open* relief through flat color plasticism. Architecture joins together, binds. Painting loosens, unbinds."[68] At the De Lange house, Van Doesburg felt that his color schemes were unable to establish this opening effect, as he was inevitably limited by the home's extensive architectural detailing. It was possibly for this reason that Van Doesburg

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66. See Van Staaten, *Theo van Doesburg*, 39.

67. "In the composition of the tile floor, as well as with the painting of the doors, etc., an aesthetic spatial effect is achieved through destruction by other means, namely, by means of painting-in-architecture. The floor is the most closed surface in the house, and, from an aesthetic point of view, therefore demands a anti-gravitational effect by means of flat color and open spatial relationships" (In de tegelvloer-compositie zoowel als in de beschildering der deuren enz., is langs andere weg, n.l. op de wijzer der schilderkunst-in-architectuur, door destructive een aesthetische ruimtewerking bereikt. De vloer is wel het meest gesloten oppervlak van het huis en eischt daarom uit aesthetish oogpunt eene als 't ware tegen de zwaartekracht ingaande werking doorvlakke kleur en open-ruimteverhouding). Theo van Doesburg, "Anteekeningen over Monumentale Kunst: Naar aanleiding van twee bouwfragmenten (hall in Vacantiehuis te Noordwijkerhout)" [Notes on monumental art with reference to two fragments of a building (hall in the vacation house at Noordwijkerhout)], *De Stijl* 2, no. 1 (November 1918): 12.

68. ". . . de architect nam ook de plaats van schilder en beeldhouwer in, wat natuurlijk tot de meest willekeurige resultaten . . . . De Bouwkunst geeft constructieve, dus *gesloten* plastiek. Daarin is zij neutraal tegenover de schilderkunst, die geeft, *open* plastiek door vlakke kleurbeelding. De Bouwkunst voegt aaneen, bindt. De schilderkunst maakt los, ontbindt." Van Doesburg, "Anteekeningen over Monumentale Kunst," 10–11.

neither wrote about the project nor published any reproductions of the interior, even though it was the most extensive decorative scheme he had executed until that time.

With Van ’t Hoff’s restrained application of architectural detailing and use of furniture in his remodeled design for the De Ligt home, however, Van Doesburg found greater creative freedom in his application of color. The design for the conservatory is strikingly complex, building on many of his earlier ideas regarding mirroring and color inversion implemented at De Vonk (to be discussed in greater detail in the following chapter). Anchoring the center of the room are two large black squares on a white floor, which are intended to be linked by an orange table placed between them. In the drawing for the room, illustrated above the floor, is a long wall with a built-in divan. To convey the depth of the niche on the flat surface of the developed surface interior, Van Doesburg was forced to set the green and orange planes into perspectival recession. To the left of the niche, a chair with a green cushion is depicted below an orange plane, mirrored by a second chair with an orange cushion below a green plane on the opposite side of the divan. This mirrored arrangement of color is organized around the black rectangle placed in the center of the niche. On the wall opposite this black plane is a central window, the frame of which Van Doesburg intended to paint black. Two additional windows, one on each side of this central window, are painted green and orange, inverting the colors of the planes that face them on the opposing wall. This theme of mirroring and opposition appears as well with each of the two shorter walls of the room, on which Van Doesburg applied a pair of rectilinear forms: one green and the other black. On the left they are vertically oriented abutting the sides of the wall, while on the right the rectilinear forms are arranged horizontally and hover in the center of the wall.

A narrow black band traverses all four walls, moving across the entire decorative arrangement. Van Doesburg alternated the band throughout the room, allowing it to function at some points as a skirting, and at others as a frieze. For example, on the wall with the niche, the black band extends as skirting—from left to right—nearly the entire length of the wall; however, it is stopped underneath the chair on the right and begun again just below the ceiling. Traversing the corner, this small section is continued onto the shorter wall to the right, where the band is then stopped and continued once again as skirting below. Nancy Troy has highlighted the importance of visual elements' traversing the corner in De Stijl practice. Doing so, she argued, broke with the tradition of mural painting, in which an artist would be confined to an isolated surface or wall within an architectural setting. Crossing the corner allowed De Stijl artists to move beyond the self-contained practice of the mural and unify all the surfaces of an interior space into a comprehensive chromatic arrangement.[69] The developed surface interior appears to have played an important role in Van Doesburg's conception of this feature. As discussed above, the drawing technique enabled a designer to conceive of an interior by folding its four walls at the seams into a three-dimensional space, viewed not from without like a model, but virtually from within.[70] The sections of the black band that traverse the corners of the room signal their reunification through this act of virtual folding.

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69. "Painting had always been considered strictly in terms of the activation of a neutral architectural plane by means of color applied in discrete areas determined and very often limited by structural considerations (including placement of furniture, the doors, ceiling, and floor, and the divisions between wall surfaces). Thus color had been understood as a complement to architecture, accenting but not interfering with the perception of its functional or constructional elements." Troy, *De Stijl Environment*, 43–44.

70. As Laura Jacobus noted, this understanding of the virtual nature of the developed surface interior has been present in its theorization since the mid-eighteenth century, and was notably highlighted by Isaac Ware. See Jacobus, "On 'Whether a Man Could See,'" 154–55.

Curiously absent from Van Doesburg's design for the De Ligt conservatory is any sort of portal to permit passage into or out of the room. Such an omission sheds light on Van Doesburg's closed conception of the space—one reinforced by the developed surface interior. As Robin Evans described it: "[The] five discontinuous planes are . . . represented in one plane and the illustration becomes completely *hermetic*; nothing outside can be shown—in this case not even the thickness of the walls. It is an imploded representation that discloses more of the interior and less of everything else."[71] The De Ligt conservatory, as depicted through the developed surface interior, operates according to this logic. It remains removed from, although nevertheless a part of, the building for which it is designed. Van Doesburg's complex interrelated color scheme, built on techniques of mirroring and inversion, reinforced the self-reflexive and unitary nature of the room.[72] This space mirrors the function of the developed surface interior, which, as Evans described, creates "its own little empire of activity, allusion and color; . . . a totally encompassing enterprise."[73] In light of Evans's observations, the developed surface interior's appeal to Van Doesburg becomes clearer. The technique's inherent capacity to produce—both conceptually and visually—an aesthetically unified space that exists within, and yet remains segregated from the fabric of the built environment, enabled Van

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71. Emphasis mine. Evans, "Developed Surface," 203.

72. In his critical study of the technique, Evans emphasized that the rise in popularity of the developed surface interior was inextricably linked to its capacity to integrate elements into a single aesthetic whole: "The developed surface also offered the opportunity for an unexampled unification of the one interior. Drapes, furnishings, fittings, wall coverings, plasterwork, floor and carpet all beg to be drawn. They are not extras to be added after the essential architectural shell has been constructed, not foreign items to be imported into a ready-made cavity. They are the things that the developed surface invites the draughtsman to describe. Because of its inclusion and unification of all these heretofore diverse elements . . . [it] has justifiably been called total design, but one has to qualify that: it was total design of an *enveloping surface* . . . ." Evans, "Developed Surface," 209.

73. Evans, "Developed Surface," 208.

Doesburg to realize the totalizing aims of De Stijl's utopian project within an actualized space. In this way, the early instantiations of the De Stijl environment, as conceived and described through the developed surface interior, mirrored the characteristics of a heterotopic, rather than utopic, space.

Michel Foucault first posited the concept of heterotopic space in relation to the built environment in his 1967 essay, "Of Other Spaces."[74] Foucault made a clear distinction between heterotopias and utopias. According to Foucault, utopias take two distinct forms, as either idealized or entirely inverted visions of society, both of which exist as "fundamentally *unreal spaces*."[75] In contrast to these unreal spaces, Foucault presented a working definition of heterotopic space:

> There are also, and this is probably in all culture, in all civilization, *real* places, effective places, places that are written into the institution of society itself, and that are a sort of counter-emplacements, a sort of effectively realized utopias in which the real emplacements, all the other real emplacements that can be found within culture, are simultaneously represented, contested and inverted; . . . places that are outside all places, even though they are actually *localized*.[76]

According to Foucault, while heterotopias engage in a process of spatial reflection and inversion similar to that undertaken by utopias, they do so in an actualized, fundamentally *real* space. He provides a far-reaching and diverse list of actual spaces that adhere to his understanding of heterotopias, all of which exist outside the typical spatial

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74. Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," in De Cauter and Dehaene, *Heterotopia and the City*, 13–30 (see n. 7 above). (Originally published as "Des espaces autres," *Architecture /Mouvement/ Continuité* 5 [1984]: 46–49.) For a history of the lecture and its reverberations in the architectural community, see Daniel Defert, "Foucault, Space, and Architects," in *Politics/Poetics: Documenta X—The Book*, ed. Catherine David and Jean-Francois Cheverier (Ostfildern-Ruit, Germany: Cantz, 1997), 274–83.

75. Emphasis mine. Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," 17.

or temporal frameworks of normal social spaces and cultural practices.[77] Prisons, gardens, theaters, and brothels, for example, all function as heterotopias in which certain activities are segregated from social view. They are locations that, as Foucault notes, "presuppose a system of opening and closing that both isolates them and makes them penetrable."[78] One does not enter these sites freely, but is either confined to them or "must submit to rites and to purification" in order to enter them.[79] Other examples of heterotopic spaces are those conditionally predicated on temporality, such as sites of ephemeral rites of passage or festivity (for example, the seasonal fair), or those that accumulate heterogeneous temporal markers (for example, the museum). There is much overlap between these two broad categories, but they all share in the fact that they exist removed from, yet ever present within the fabric of society. During the formative years of De Stijl, artists such as Van Doesburg, Van der Leck, Huszar, and even Mondrian—in the design of his studio—were forced to realize their utopian visions in a similar manner: as segregated and fragmentary heterotopic spaces within the framework of an already extant built environment. As noted above, the logic of the developed surface interior was integral in the conceptualization of such heterotopic spaces, and provides an explanation for the frequent use of the technique by De Stijl artists during the early years of the movement.[80]

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76. Emphasis mine. Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," 17.

77. Peter Johnson, "Unraveling Foucault's 'Different Spaces,'" *History of the Human Sciences* 19, no. 4 (2006): 78.

78. Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," 21.

79. Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," 21.

80. It is worth noting that the earliest examples of developed surface drawings were not of interiors, but of gardens and town squares, sites within Foucault's taxonomy of heterotopic space. Evans, "Developed Surface," 203.

Heterotopias have a second important role beyond merely existing as locations that operate both within and without the matrix of typically social space. According to Foucault, all heterotopias must serve a social function. Frequently this role is one of either conditioning or facilitating behaviors that fall outside of societal norms. They are, in this way, spaces of disruption or deviation. As Peter Johnson noted, such heterotopias "alter to different degrees what might be described as everyday existence."[81] Foucault listed a number of examples of such functions and their corresponding heterotopias. They included locations such as Jesuit colonies, which existed as "marvelous, absolutely regulated colonies in which human perfection was effectively accomplished," and the boarding school, a liminal place at which the transitional phase of sexual development is monitored and shaped.[82]

De Stijl artists conceived of their early interiors as performing a similar task. Their interiors, while existing within a built environment shaped by nineteenth-century design practices, and by extension social and aesthetic norms, sought to deviate from their surrounding architectural contexts in order to establish actualized locations of retreat that could lead to the conditioning of a "modern consciousness." This was at the core of the group's mission, and was explicitly stated in its opening manifesto which introduced the first issue of *De Stijl*:

> This little periodical hopes to make a contribution to the development of a new awareness of beauty. . . . The Editors will try to achieve the aim described above by providing a mouthpiece for the truly modern artists, who had a contribution to make to the reshaping of the aesthetic concept and the awareness of the visual

81. Johnson, "Unraveling Foucault's 'Different Spaces,'" 84.
82. Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," 18–21.

> arts. Since the public is not yet able to appreciate the beauty in the *nieuwe beelding*, it is the task of the professional to awaken the layman's sense of beauty. The truly modern—i.e. conscious—artists have a double vocation: in the first place to produce the purely plastic work of art, in the second place to prepare the public's mind for the purely plastic art.[83]

In this manifesto, the group's Nietzschean declaration mirrors the liminal nature of heterotopic spaces as described by Foucault. Only by confining the utopian vision within an actualized location, at least initially, could the conditioning of a "new consciousness" begin to occur.

This desire for the aesthetic transformation of the modern viewing subject was inherent in the use of the term *nieuwe beelding* as the label for De Stijl's theoretical platform. The word *beelding* has no direct translation into English, and was itself uncommon in Dutch. It is derived from the noun *beeld*, "an image or picture," through which it is related to such forms as *beeldend*, "expressive," and *beeldende kunst*, "visual or plastic art."[84] Its meaning, as Michael White has summarized, "has connotations of structure making, image creation or forming."[85] However, frequently left unsaid in this philological parsing of the meaning of *nieuwe beelding* is the theoretical term's relationship to education, and particularly to the German notion of *Bildung*, or the "self-

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83. Van Doesburg, "Ter inleiding," 1–2 (see chap. 1, n. 3).

84. For a complete analysis of the matrix of meanings located in *beelding*, see Richard Padovan, *Towards Universality: Le Corbusier, Mies and De Stijl* (London: Routledge, 2002), 36–42.

85. White, *De Stijl and Dutch Modernism*, 3. The term was adopted by Mondrian from the mathematician Mathieu Hubertus Josephus Schoenmaekers, whose idiosyncratic application of theosophy to mathematics in his books *The New Image of the World* (*Het nieuwe werelbeeld*, 1915) and *Principles of Visual Mathematics* (*Beginselen der beeldende wiskunde*, 1916) was influential in the painter's early thinking. See Jaffé, *De Stijl: 1917–1931*, 12–13 (see chap. 1, n. 1).

cultivation of the individual."[86] In fact, in De Stijl's 1918 manifesto—published in four languages in *De Stijl—nieuwe beeling* is directly translated into German as *neue Bildung*.[87] De Stijl's theoretical project intrinsically linked the enactment of this notion of self-cultivation with the establishment of the necessary environmental conditions for it to occur.

It was for this reason that Van Doesburg reveled in any opportunity to actualize these provisional spaces. He believed it was principally through such spaces that his vision of *nieuwe beelding* could truly be advanced. The year after he completed his schemes for the De Ligt home, he was given a new opportunity to design the color schemes for an interior. The project was another commission from De Ligt, who shortly after moving into his remodeled home in Lage Vuursche was forced to relocate his family to Katwijk, on the North Sea coast, to assist in the convalescence of his sick daughter.[88] In Katwijk, Van Doesburg was restricted to just one room within the new home (fig. 4.20).[89] The project proved to be a challenge, as the space was awkwardly shaped. It consisted of five walls, and contained a built-in divan, several protruding cabinets, and as Alied Ottevanger has observed, a rafter projecting from one of the walls (fig. 4.21).[90] He addressed these difficulties directly in an explanatory text on the project, writing:

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86. George L. Mosse, *The Image of Man: The Creation of Modern Masculinity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 8.

87. See Theo van Doesburg, et al., "Manifest I van 'De Stijl,' 1918," *De Stijl* 2, no. 1 (November 1918): 2; and the German translation which followed, Theo van Doesburg, et al., "Manifest I von 'De Stijl', 1918," *De Stijl* 2, no. 1 (November 1918): 5.

88. Van Staaten, *Theo van Doesburg*, 66.

89. Letter from Van Doesburg to J. J. P. Oud, January 7, 1920. In *Theo van Doesburg: Oeuvre Catalogue*, ed. Els Hoek (Bussum, Netherlands: Thoth, 2000), 261.

90. Ottevanger, "A Painting in 3 Dim," 175.

> When architect and painter proceed from one concept, i.e. balanced distribution of space for the former, and of color for the latter, this can lead to an expression of space that is both architectonic and painterly. Doors, window frames, paneling, etc. will be flat, and aesthetic through nothing but their architectonic arrangement. Since the opposite was the case in the interior reproduced here—the space of the room being accidental and materialistic—the painter's task of creating an aesthetic space through balanced color distribution was made very difficult. The poor, impressionistic architectonic arrangement (one notes the angled corners, the cross-connections of the doors, etc.) always comes into conflict with the fixed color arrangement. Nevertheless, the painter succeeded in rendering the five painted planes (ceiling and walls) . . . as a compositional whole.[91]

The complexity that Van Doesburg alludes to is visible in the difficulty he had in composing his developed surface interior for the room.[92] For example, the protrusion of two closets into the space of the room required him to leave two conspicuous gaps in his drawing, to allow the proportions of the space to be retained. The wall with the "angled corner" also fits into the drawing somewhat awkwardly. Leading to further difficulty was Van Doesburg's decision to represent not the floor of the room in the center of the developed surface interior, as he had done for the conservatory, but the ceiling instead. The effect of this inversion was to reverse the process by which the space is virtually conceived. The walls now fold down from above around the viewer, rather than up from

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91. "Wanneer architect en schilder uitgaan van één begrip n.l. van evenwichtige indeeling, de eerste van de Ruimte, de tweede van de Kleur, zal dit kunnen leiden tot een, zoowel architectonische, als schilderkunstige beelding der ruimte. Deuren, kozijnen, lampbriseeringen enz. zullen vlak zijn en door niets dan hun architectonische indeeling esthetisch. Daar in het hier gereproduceerde intérieur het tegendeel het geval was, de kamerruimte slechts toevallig en materiel, werd de taak van den schilder, om door evenwichtige kleurindeeling een esthetische ruimte te beelden, zeer bemoeilijkt. De slechte, impressionische architectonische indeeling (men lette op de schuine hoeken, de kuisverbinding der deuren enz.) komt steeds met een strakke kleurindeeling in conflict. Niettegenstaande wist de schilder de vijf beschilderde vlakken (plafond en muren) . . . tot een compositorisch geheel, te maken." Theo van Doesburg, "Aanteekening bij de bijlage" [Notes on the image], *De Stijl* 3, no. 12 (November 1920): 103.

the floor. This reversal of folding may have led to another problem with the drawing: Van Doesburg incorrectly oriented the walls, so they do not correspond to the room as it existed.

In spite of the challenges the space posed, Van Doesburg felt that he had come close to success with the Katwijk room. Writing to Oud during the early stages of the project, he expressed his great excitement: "I am at De Ligt's, working on something magnificent. A painting in 3 Dim[ensions]."[93] He added shortly afterward, in another letter to Oud, "My subconscious tells me that I now have the chance to captivate the world with the new idea, and to force people to accept a new form. . . . But my conscious mind tells me that every step brings me closer to certain ruin. That then, I must hope, implies new success?!"[94] Van Doesburg's satisfaction with the space was put on full display when he published a black-and-white photograph of the room in *De Stijl* (at that point only the second photograph of an interior designed by a member of the group to be reproduced in the magazine).[95] The motivation for his exaltation of his design in the pages of *De Stijl* may have been hinted at by Gerrit Rietveld, who after visiting the room wrote to Van Doesburg: "Actually, I thought it was a botched-up cubby-hole. Those little doors were particularly bad. I like the dimensions, and you have succeeded completely in

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92. Ottevanger, "A Painting in 3 Dim," 175.

93. Letter from Van Doesburg to J. J. P. Oud, December 23, 1919. Quoted and translated in Alied Ottevanger, "A Painting in 3 Dim," 172.

94. "Mijn onderbewustzijn zegt me, dat ik nu kans heb de wereld met de nieuwe gedachte in te nemen en te dwingenen nieuwe voorm aan te nemen. . . . Doch mijn bewustzijn zegt mij dat elke stap me nader brengt tot een zekeren ondergang. Die dan, wil ik hoopen, weer een nieuwen opgang vóór-onderstelt?!" From a letter sent by Van Doesburg to Oud, January 7, 1920. In Hoek, *Theo van Doesburg: Oeuvre Catalogue,* 261.

95. The only interior by a De Stjl artist to be reproduced before this room was Van Doesburg's design for De Vonk.

presenting it as a whole (because of the color)."[96] Rietveld's comments alluded to Van Doesburg's success in overcoming the constraints imposed upon him by the architecture of the building in which he was working. What warranted the reproduction of an image of the room in the pages of the *De Stijl* was its demonstration of the transformation of the De Ligt room into a unitary, aesthetic whole, through the liberating capacity of color.

From *Stemming* to *Gestemdheid*: Creating the "New Man" in the New Interior

Color was acknowledged as *the* essential element in the creation and activation of the heterotopic space of the De Stijl interior. While De Stijl's ideas on color theory are typically rooted in the writings of Piet Mondrian, they were not driven by the Dutch painter alone. Van Doesburg and Huszar also developed their own conceptualization of color in the interior. Their relationship to color was affected by their closeness to long-standing debates on the nature of color within the realm of the decorative arts. A lecture that Huszar gave in 1922 at the Second Congress of Modern Art in Antwerp, entitled "On the Modern Applied Arts," provides some insight. The lecture traced the evolution of the decorative arts from ancient Egypt to the present along Hegelian lines, in order to cast in strong relief the aesthetic void he felt was present in the decorative arts. Huszar established a link between the construction of a new design aesthetic and the constitution of a new type of subjectivity. In the opening remarks, he posed the question: "We are in an emergent, and thus a new (very mobile) epoch. How can one perceive, experience, and

96. Letter from Gerrit Rietveld to Van Doesburg, February 28, 1920. Reproduced and translated in Van Straaten, *Theo van Doesburg*, 66.

express such a thing?"[97] To answer this question, he concluded, "The *new art* demands the *new man* and the *new man* demands the *new art*."[98] In the decorative arts generally, and in interior design specifically, Huszar asserted that in order to encourage the emergence of such a modern perceiving subject, identified as the "new man," objectivity must be reinserted into the manner in which such aesthetic spaces are conceived and constructed. In his speech, he sought to clarify and differentiate his position from those of theorists of the previous century by setting apart his neologism, *gestemdheid*, from the notion of *stemming*.[99]

The Dutch word *stemming* is a cognate with the German word *Stimmung*. Its meaning varies between "mood" and "atmosphere," while also conveying the musical connotation of being "in tune."[100] Yet *Stimmung*, and to a similar extent its Dutch equivalent, had a much broader implication in relation to the decorative arts. "Most importantly," as Margaret Olin has noted, "it seemed to unite the inner 'mood' of the individual with the 'atmosphere' of his environment, either his natural environment, or

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97. "Wij zijn in een opkomend, dus in een nieuw tijdperk (zeer bewegelijk). Hoe kan men zoo iets waarnemen, beleven en uiten?" Huszar, "Over de modern toegepaste kunst," part 1, p. 59 (see intro. chap. 1, n. 15).

98. "Nieuwe kunst vraagt den nieuwen mensch en de nieuwe mensch vraagt de nieuwe kunst." Huszar, "Modern toegepaste kunst," part 2, p. 77.

99. Huszar, "Over de modern toegepaste kunst," part 1, p. 65. Michael White has discussed Van der Leck's opposition to the term *stemming*, writing, "Two months earlier [Helene Kröller-Müller] criticized Van der Leck for letting himself be too greatly influenced by Mondrian without achieving the same sense of mood or mystical feeling she saw in the latter. Van Der Leck vociferously defended himself against this charge and in a letter to Kröller-Müller in October 1916 stated his aim: 'No illusion, no mood [*stemming*], no fascination, but monumental clarity is what I have in mind.' He chose his words carefully here, particularly dismissing *stemming* (mood), which had been a term prevalent in art criticism in the Netherlands since the late nineteenth century, used often in support of impressionist painting." White, *De Stijl and Dutch Modernism*, 17. While pointing to *stemming* in relationship to painting, White entirely overlooks the term's broader Germanic origins within the decorative arts.

100. F. P. H. Prick van Wely, *Cassell's English-Dutch/Dutch-English Dictionary* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1967), 543.

the social environment of the group, and it did this while stirring up the reassuring, patriotic feeling of having a peculiarly 'Germanic' sentiment."[101] By the end of the nineteenth century, *Stimmung* was an established theoretical term in the Germanic discourse on interior design. It was used to convey the ability of a space to construct an environment that could instill a certain psychological mood upon the occupant within.[102] The term became a placeholder for the affective capacity of a given space. Color played an essential role in this practice, garnering attention in many of the published treatises concerning the nature of subjectivity and vision in the modern interior.

Eric Anderson has traced the solidification of this theoretical discourse through two Viennese intellectuals: Ernst Wilhelm von Brücke (1819–1892), a physiologist and member of the curatorial board of the Austrian Museum for Art and Industry (Österreichisches Museum für Kunst und Industrie); and Jakob von Falke (1825–1897), a founder of the museum.[103] In 1866, encouraged by Falke, Brücke published his text *The Physiology of Colors Adapted for the Uses of the Applied Arts*.[104] Unlike other contemporaneous studies of the decorative arts, which responded to the perceived material deficiencies of mass production or the growing anxiety over stylistic eclecticism,[105] Brücke's study, Anderson noted, "focused on the physiology and psychology of perception and the ways that color triggers emotion in the mind of the

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101. Margaret Olin, "Alois Riegl and the Crisis of Representation in Art Theory: 1880–1905" (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 1982), 408–9.

102. For a broader discussion of nineteenth-century interior design and its construction of "atmosphere" see Muthesius, *The Poetic Home*, 151–70 (see chap. 3, n. 37).

103. Eric Anderson, "Hans Makart's Technicolor Dream House: Decoration and Subjectivity in Nineteenth-Century Vienna," *West 86th* 22, no. 1 (Spring–Summer 2015): 1–13.

104. Ernst Wilhelm von Brücke, *Die Physiologie der Farben für die Zwecke der Kunstgewerbe* (Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 1866).

105. For further reference, see my discussion of the topic in chapters 1 and 2.

observer."[106] He argued that color, and its perception by a viewing subject, was not an objective system. Color, Brücke maintained, did not exist as an a priori set of data in the form of light received objectively by the body. Rather, he argued, "Colors are sensations aroused in us by light. . . . What we describe as colors are on the one hand certain sensations and on the other hand the causes from which these sensations derive."[107] According to Brücke, the experience of color is a completely biological construct, formed by the subjective experience of the viewer and deeply interrelated with the physiological and psychological responses aroused by stimuli in the body.

For this reason, Brücke argued, the decorative arts, and the interior in particular, were the ideal vessels to enact the concept of *Stimmung*. The fine arts, he believed, could not accomplish this goal, for they were restricted to the objective task of mimetic representation, and mostly constrained by the linearity of perspective. With interior design, on the other hand, color could be let loose to create a sensory experience of atmosphere which was capable of affecting the physiological or psychological condition of a subject.[108] Falke drew a parallel conclusion in his 1871 book, *Art in the House*: "Ordinarily, and one might may say absolutely, color is of more importance in the decorative appointments of a house than form."[109] Noting specifically that the decorative arts were uniquely positioned to affect the psychological perception of a given interior, he continued:

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106. Anderson, "Hans Makart's Technicolor Dream House," 9.

107. Translated in Anderson, "Hans Makart's Technicolor Dream House," 9.

108. Anderson, "Hans Makart's Technicolor Dream House," 10.

109. Jacob von Falke, *Art in the House: Historical, Critical, and Aesthetical Studies on the Decoration and Furnishing of the Dwelling*, trans. Charles C. Perkins (Boston: L. Prang, 1879), 170.

> A room may be made to look narrower or broader, lower or higher, by means of color. If we desire to make it grave or cheerful, bare or rich, simple or splendid; if we would impart to it a cozy and attractive or a poetic aspect [*stimmung*], make it look warm or cool; if we would fashion for ourselves a place to dream in, or one fitted for serious and solitary meditation, or one suited to social enjoyment, our first and last medium is color.[110]

With his evocation of poetry and dreams, Falke emphasized the privileged position of color above the strictly material qualities of a given space in the creation of a psychological affect. As Anderson argued, "For Falke, the role of color is to draw the viewer into a fantasy, beyond the objective and the ordinary, in which to find escape and, ultimately, a state of well-being or emotional health."[111] In the modern era, Falke asserted, a "cheerful harmony" of color in the interior was critical to the psychological well-being of its inhabitants.

Nearly three decades after the publication of Falke's book, Alois Riegl (1858–1905), the important Austrian art historian and director of the textile department at the Austrian Museum for Art and Industry, published an essay entitled "Mood as the Content of Modern Art" (1899).[112] Riegl sought to answer why *Stimmung* had come to hold a prominent place in cultural and aesthetic discourse at the time.[113] He suggested that the urge for *Stimmung* at the fin de siècle stemmed from a spiritual crisis. Drawing on his

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110. Falke, *Art in the House*, 170–71.

111. Anderson, "Hans Makart's Technicolor Dream House," 12.

112. Alois Riegl, "Die Stimmung als Inhalt der modernen Kunst," *Graphische Künste* 22 (1899): 47–56). Repr. in Riegl, *Gesammelte Aufsätze*, ed. Artur Rosenhauer (Vienna: 1996), 27–37.

113. Margaret Olin suggested that Riegl's attempt to accommodate *Stimmung* into his theoretical models "reflected an attempt to adjudicate the very lovely controversy in Vienna between the emotionalist Secessionists and their rationalist opponents, a controversy that, already heated in 1898, was to erupt in 1900, in a battle over [Gustave Klimt's painting *Philosophy*, commissioned for the ceiling of the Aula at the University of Vienna]." Olin, "Alois Riegl," 417.

theory of historical development centered upon the idea of *Kunstwollen* (literally "the will to art"; his concept echoed, although never quite approached, the positivism of Hegelian philosophy), Riegl argued that such a spiritual crisis arose from the failure of scientific thought and material progress to replace the metaphysical security provided by religion's spirituality.[114] Thus *Stimmung* arose as a dialectical response to the metaphysical void left in the wake of religion's Nietzschean death.

Huszar, who studied mural painting and decoration at the School of Applied Art in Budapest, would likely have been aware of this theoretical discourse within the Austro-Hungarian Empire. It was precisely against the concept of *Stimmung* that he established his own position. "In place of *stemming*," Huszar declared, "*gestemdheid*."[115] The meaning of his neologism *gestemdheid* is difficult to define. Formed from the past participle of the Dutch verb *stemmen* ("to tune," as an instrument), the noun evokes the musical sense of "melody" conveyed in the noun *stemming,* yet it is imbued with a sense of action. Huszar provided a clearer definition in an earlier essay. He argued: "*Gestemdheid* is not to be confused with *stemming*. The latter transforms the individual through its own spiritual condition (sadness, happiness, etc.); with the former the individual is subordinate to the universal."[116] He used *gestemdheid* to counter what he perceived as the capricious and romantic nature of *stemming*. Huszar believed that the

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114. For a detailed discussion of Riegl's understanding of *Stimmung* and its dependence on Schopenhauer, see Diana Graham Reynolds, "Alois Riegl and the Politics of Art History: Intellectual Traditions and Austrian Identity in *Fin-de-Siècle* Vienna" (PhD diss., University of California, San Diego, 1997), 247.

115. "In plaats van de stemming de gestemdheid." See Huszar, "Over de modern toegepaste kunst," part 1, p. 65.

116. "Gestemdheid niet te verwarren met stemming; de laatste ondergaat het individu in zij eigen ziel toestand (treurig, vroolijk, enz.); bij de eerste is het individu ondergeschikt aan het

concern with the establishment of atmosphere that defined nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century design theory was motivated by a romantic desire for an escape from, rather than a confrontation with, the conditions of modernity. As such, the notion of *stemming* failed to satisfy the metaphysical needs of a modern subject, as argued by Riegl.

Color, which as mentioned above held primacy of place within the discourse surrounding *stemming*, became the focus of Huszar's effort to propose a new, objective system through which *gestemdheid* could be established within the interior. His discovery of Wilhelm Ostwald's (1853–1932) color theory provided a critical foundation for his theorization of the new role color was to play in the modern built environment. The German chemist had sought to create a quantifiable formula, as Michael White summarized, "for adequating the materiality of color pigment to the immateriality of colored light."[117] Toward that end, he devised a mathematical scale, illustrated by a color wheel (fig. 4.22), which assigned numerical values to the variations of a given hue and tone of a color. In his review of Ostwald's book, *The Color Primer* (1916), in the pages of *De Stijl*, Huszar explained the significance of such a mathematically derived color theory for painting in general, and for monumental painting specifically.[118] First, he identified the practical application of Ostwald's theory for interior design. According to Huszar, it strengthened the relationship between the role of the artist, who creates the interior design, and that of the painter, who is tasked with executing the design. By

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universeele." Huszar, "Aesthetische Beshouwingen: IV" [Aesthetic considerations: 4], *De Stijl* 1, no. 7 (May 1918): 81.

117. White, *De Stijl and Dutch Modernism*, 117–18.

118 .Vilmos Huszar, "Iets over Die Farbenfibel van W. Ostwald," *De Stijl* 1, no. 10 (August 1918): 113–18.

standardizing colors in a numerical order, Ostwald's system ensures that the artist maintains an exact color value as his design is transferred from paper to wall.[119] Second, and more significant for De Stijl's theorization of interior decoration, Ostwald's theory established a scientific basis for the objective application of color to the interior (and, as will be discussed below, the exterior) of a building, discarding the intuitive conceptualization of color application from the previous century.[120]

Huszar's embrace of this scientific application of color was essential to his project to restructure the social underpinnings of interior design. The nineteenth-century quest to establish *stemming*, or atmosphere, within the built environment was often filtered through highly gendered terms that associated the practice with the femininity of domestic space.[121] This was reinforced by the long-standing tradition that tied color—as opposed to draftsmanship—to the sphere of the feminine, and thus assigned it a marginalized position within aesthetics. As John Gage wrote, "For in one phase of the post-Renaissance debate about the values of *disegno* and *colore*, even when both of them were characterized (as attributes of *pictura*) as female, color was the 'bawd' whose wiles and attractions lured spectators into trafficking with her sister, drawing."[122] Color remained associated with the irrationality of emotion and the superficiality of stimulation, whereas design was tethered to the exalted realm of a decisively masculine rationalism.

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119. Huszar, "Farbenfibel van W. Ostwald," 117.

120. Huszar, "Farbenfibel van W. Ostwald," 115.

121. Falke, for example, devotes an entire chapter of *Art in the House* to "Woman's Aesthetic Mission." Falke, *Art in the House*, 311–36. For further discussion of the gendered nature of *Stimmung* see Anderson, "Hans Makart's Technicolor Dream House," 12.

122. John Gage, "Color in Western Art: An Issue?," *The Art Bulletin* 72, no. 4 (December 1990), 519.

Huszar's embrace of Ostwald's theories was an attempt to uproot such underlying feminine tropes, which for him extended beyond the realm of discourse into the social network of modern society. "We must," he wrote, "find the error in our social situation: that, everywhere we look, appearances (stimulations) dominate, while the immediate truth arising from inner conviction is being mocked."[123] According to Huszar, this aesthetic fascination with mere "appearances" and "stimulations" educed by color within the built environment reflected a contemporary culture succumbing to "spiritual impotence."[124] Van Doesburg voiced Huszar's concerns in nearly identical terms:

> The concept of monumentality has changed considerably in favor of the sense for style, since architects no longer delight in the capricious play of the baroque with its excesses and outcomes. Our spiritual age no longer allows puppet-like figures painted on a wall—preferably with a suitable aphorism . . . in the manner of candy advertisements—and while having no organic relationship with that wall, to be regarded as monumental painting appropriate to the spirit of the age. Representation or symbolism is not equivalent to the "plastic" and must be considered as belonging to a phase in human consciousness of *one-sided idealism*, in which the spirit was, as it were, afraid of engaging itself in the concrete material such as form, color, or relationship from one to another. Such "monumental" art, which in essence is no more than the decorative appearance of monumentality, perhaps suitable in the weak, feminine architecture of the past, will no longer have any place in the masculine architecture of the future.[125]

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123. "Wij moeten hier de fout zoeken in onze maatschappelijke toestanden, overall zien wij, dat de schijnuitingen (prikkels) overheerschen, terwijl het onmiddellijk-ware, onstaan uit innerlijke overtuiging bespot wordt." Huszar, "Aesthetische Beshouwingen: IV," 80.

124. "This lack of content and decline of decoration signifies spiritual impotence" [Deze mist inhoud en vervalt in versiering, wat geestelijke onmacht beteekent]. Huszar, "Aesthetische Beshouwingen: IV," 80.

125. "De opvatting der monumentaliteit heeft zich sinds de architecten zich niet meer verlustigden aan het grillig spel van het Barok met zijn uitwassen en uitvloeisels, belangrijk ten gunste van het stijl gevoel gewijzigd. Onze geestelijke dracht laat niet meer toe, poppetjes op een

Implicit in Huszar's evocation of "spiritual impotence" and Van Doesburg's rejection of the "weak, feminine architecture of the past" was a deep concern for the issue of decadence and decline, as it pertained to nineteenth-century European aesthetics and culture. Discussed in chapter 1 regarding its intrinsic relationship to history, this discourse on decadence—ubiquitous in the years around the turn of the century—also drew upon gendered tropes to describe and explicate the reasons for such perceived cultural decline. The culture of the nineteenth century became feminized, and those producers in this field of cultural production effeminate. This was evinced by the anxiety frequently articulated by modern artists regarding the slippage of their work into the realms of fashion or mass production, two fields frequently qualified as feminine.[126]

Huszar's promotion—and, for that matter, De Stijl's more broadly—of the masculinizing discourse of the "new man" was in direct opposition to this feminized characterization of nineteenth-century decadence. Yet unlike the celebration of the idealized masculine strength and virility that would come to be the foundation for the construction of a unifying, nationalist identity by artists in Russia, Germany, and France,

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muur geschilderd—liefst nog met een toegpasselijke spreuk er bij ... op de wijzer der ulevellenspreuken—en met dien muur in geen enkel organisch verband staande, voor aan den tijdgeest evenredige, monumentale schilderkunst aan te zien. Verbeelden of verzinnebeelden is nog niet aan "beelden" toe en moet geacht worden tot een phase in het menschelijk bewistzijn te behooren, van *eenzijdige idealiteit*, waarin de geest als 't ware bang was zich in de concrete stof als vorm, kleur of verhouding van het een tot het ander, af te drukken. Dergelijke "monumentale" kunst die in wezen niet meer is dan de decoratieve schijn der monumentaliteit, paste wellicht in de vrouwelijk-slappe architectuur van het verleden, in de mannelijk architectuur der toekomst zal zij geen plaats meer hebben." Van Doesburg, "Anteekeningen over Monumentale Kunst," 11 (see n. 68 above).

126. On fashion and architecture, see Wigley, "Redressing Architecture," in *White Walls, Designer Dresses,* 85–126 (see n. 58 above). On the nature of mass production and the feminine, see Andreas Huyssen, "Mass Culture as Woman: Modernism's Other," in *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 44–64. See also Frederic Schwartz, "Style Versus Fashion: The Werkbund and the Discourse on Culture in Germany," in *The Werkbund*, 13–74 (see chap. 2, n. 97).

De Stijl's promotion of a masculinizing discourse in the years following World War I had little to do with a corporal representation of the masculine.[127] Rather, De Stijl's conception of the "new man" closely paralleled that which was grounded in what George Mosse saw as a broader socialist ideal. In his important survey of the construction of masculinity in the modern era, Mosse described this ideal:

> It was the socialist ideal of a "new man" that provided a counterpoint to many of the qualities of normative manhood: a masculinity based upon solidarity, the renunciation of all force, and the rejection of nationalism as an ideal that would serve to purify modern man. Such a new man could become reality only at a time when masculinity was no longer anchored in bourgeois society. . . . And in perhaps the greatest break with the past, the very concept of masculinity would be subsumed under mankind as a whole—a common humanity that drew masculinity's sting.[128]

As alluded to above, this image of postwar masculinity was not tethered to the physical representation of the masculine, but, as Mosse clarifies, this movement, "returned to the ideas of the Enlightenment put forward nearly a hundred years earlier. These socialists were on the whole concerned not with bodily images, but with a humanistic spirit which the new man must possess."[129] That spirit was one rooted in a faith in human rationality that only had to be brought out in the subject to bring about fundamental changes in society. Such was the crux of De Stijl's theory of *nieuwe beelding* and its aim to

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127. On France, see Romy Golan, "The Return to Man," in *Modernity and Nostalgia: Art and Politics in France Between the Wars* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 85–104. In Germany, see Maria Makela, "New Women, New Men, New Objectivity," in *New Objectivity: Modern German Art in the Weimar Republic, 1919–1933*, ed. Stephanie Barron and Sabine Eckmann (Los Angeles: County Museum of Art, 2015), 51–64; In Russia, see Leah Dickerman, "The Propagandizing of Things," in *Aleksandr Rodchenko*, ed. Magdalena Dabrowski, Leah Dickerman, and Peter Galassi (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1998), 62–99.

128. Mosse, *Image of Man,* 119–20.

condition the self-cultivation of a modern man, not through politics but an aesthetics built on rational principles.[130] The transference of color from the subjective realm of *stemming* to that of a scientific and objective *gestemdheid*—a movement Huszar believed Ostwald's theories enabled—recategorized the approach to interior design from the perceived effeminate capriciousness of the past century to this masculinized ideal, built upon faith in a postwar revival of Enlightenment rationalism.

In this way De Stijl departed from the militarized conception of masculinity argued for by Filippo Tommaso Marinetti (1876–1944) in the years before the war, as well as from the postwar political revolutionary *New Man* (fig. 4.23), reimagined by El Lissitzky (1890–1941) for the play *Victory Over the Sun* in 1923.[131] As early as 1917, Huszar began to give form to De Stijl's ideal of modern man with his *Mechanical Dancing Figure* (fig. 4.24), completed three years later in 1920. Derived from the traditions of Javanese shadow puppetry, Huszar created an abstracted figure composed from black, geometric shapes. Using a spotlight, the figure's shadow was cast on a screen, while a series of keys that moved the elements of the body through strings set the figure into motion.[132] Interspersed across the figure's body were translucent red and

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129. Mosse, *Image of Man,* 14.

130. The position of the Netherlands in the years following World War I, it must be remembered, was drastically different from that of France, Italy, Russia, or Germany. The Dutch were not scarred physically by mass causalities; ecologically, as in France, by the shattered forests and landscapes cut open by trenches and bomb craters; or politically, as in Russia or Germany. The country's neutrality during the war enabled it—while not without hardship—to maintain relative political and economic stability following the Armistice.

131. F. T. Marinetti, "The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism," repr. and trans. in *Futurism: An Anthology*, ed. Lawrence Rainey, Christine Poggi, and Laura Wittman (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 49–53.

132. The first shadow puppet performance was held in 1920, and Huszar presented it again for the Dada tour of the Netherlands arranged by Van Doesburg and Kurt Schwitters (1887–1948) in 1923. Huszar provided an explanation of the figure in Schwitter's journal, *Merz*: "This

green rectilinear forms which fused color with the figure's form on the screen. The end result was a model of man that was conceived of as fundamentally an aesthetic being. Van Doesburg alluded to this in a letter to Kok, in which he compared the figure to a "painting in motion."[133] Yet the most significant aspect of Huszar's *Mechanical Dancing Figure* was its translucency. It enabled the figure, and the field onto which it was being cast, to collapse into one and the same plane (fig. 4.25).

This desire to unify figure and environment is essential to understanding Huszar's ideas of the built environment and its relationship to the subject within it. In his far-reaching survey of the evolution of the applied arts delivered in Antwerp, discussed above, Huszar concluded his lecture with two of his own works that exemplified his thinking through of the "new man" and the shape of his new environment. The first was a bedroom the artist had designed for the two young children of Cornelis Bruynzeel Jr., his neighbor in Voorburg and the wealthy owner of a prominent wood manufacturing company in the Netherlands. Commissioned in 1918, the space was his first opportunity to enact his theories of a unified, rational color scheme for an interior predicated on Ostwald's ideas.[134] Bruynzeel asked Huszar, in collaboration with the Dutch architect and

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mechanical dancing figure appears on a white screen as a shadow. The planes on the figure are transparent, green and red. Movement is directed from behind, below the stage, by means of keys (of which there are ten) connected to the figure by strings. Each movement is determined in a right angle and nothing is accidental. The head can also turn to the right. The aim is to produce a plastic composition with each pose and incorporate the intermediary space of the background into the composition." Vilmos Huszar, "Mechanische Dansfiguur," *Merz* 1 (January 1923): 13. Quoted and translated in White, *De Stijl and Dutch Modernism*, 39.

133. Letter from Van Doesburg to Kok, July 14, 1917. "Yesterday, I had Huszar over. . . . He has discovered something entirely new. Painting in motion" [Gisteren had ik Huszar hier. . . . Hij heft iets geheel nieuws gevonden. Bewegende schilderkunst]. Repr. in Ottevanger, *De Stijl overall absolute leiding,* 197 (see n. 64 above).

134. By the time of the commission, Huszar already had a strong working relationship with Bruynzeel, having designed an advertisement for parquet flooring the company produced, which was reproduced in the first volume of *De Stijl*; in February 1918, a display stand for the company

furniture designer, Piet Klaarhamer (1874–1954), to design a bedroom for his two young boys. Klaarhamer was charged with designing the furniture for the room—which will be addressed in chapter 7—and Huszar the color scheme. The room itself was an irregular shape. At one end was an alcove with a lowered ceiling, in which the two beds were placed on either side of a closet (fig. 4.26). On the other side was another shallow alcove which contained two sinks placed next to the entrance to the room (fig. 4.27). Light entered the space through three large windows on one of the longer walls. For his color scheme, Huszar used white and gray as the principal colors for his walls. He placed fields of the two colors on the same walls to prevent either from being read as a background. The most notable example of this is the play of positive and negative space on the short wall with the closet, in which a white square appears on a gray wall, and opposite it a gray square on a white wall. Huszar applied additional geometric forms in primary colors throughout the room. In thinking through balancing the effect of color, Huszar turned to Ostwald's color theory to realize both a proportional distribution of color throughout the room and the unification of color planes within the space.[135] Huszar celebrated the success of the Bruynzeel bedroom with three slides, explaining to the Antwerp audience: "What the pointillists had seen in nature, I have attempted to do here with planes that are

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at the *Jaarbeurs* (National Trade Exhibition) in Utrecht; and, finally, a large-scale skylight for Bruynzeel's Voorburg home. For a discussion of Huszar's work in advertising, see White, *De Stijl and Dutch Modernism*, 78–79, 151–52. For an analysis of his stained-glass window see Ex, "Huszar," in Blotkamp, *Formative Years,* 88 (see n. 1 above).

135. Els Hoek and Sjarel Ex note that in a letter to the artist Chris Beekman (1887–1964) dated April 11, 1919, Huszar described how he had conceived the bedroom's color palette through a numerical system derived from Ostwald. Hoek and Ex, *Vilmos Huszar*, 58 (see chap. 1, n. 26).

deduced logically from the plastic forms. As a consequence, light can be plasticized in the interior."[136]

Following his slides on the Bruynzeel room, and as a conclusion to his lecture, Huszar projected a slide of a drawing for his *Plastic Drama* (1920–21; fig. 4.28). The theatrical production was intended to advance the ideas he explored with the *Mechanical Dancing Figure*, and provide a further example of how "the new plastic can realize itself in abstract form."[137] The play, to be executed in four parts, involved the movements of two figures, composed of abstract, rectilinear forms. The shapes used to create the figures were also used in the design of the stage. It was meant to put on display a rhythmic drama in which form, movement, and time are brought into aesthetic unity. As Nancy Troy observed, once again Huszar advanced his desire to merge subject and environment: "Through a continuous alternation of movement and stasis, Huszar hoped to create a kinetic effect of successive, independent compositions which … would call attention to the integration of figure and surrounding space."[138] The impetus behind Huszar's selection of these two works as the final illustrations to his lecture was the implicit congruence between the experimental and transformative nature of the theater—itself a quintessentially heterotopic space—with that of his current experiments within the interior (fig. 4.29). Huszar's comparison between theater and interior was not uncommon among artists thinking through the reshaping of the modern built environment. For

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136. "Wat de pointillisten in de natuur gezien hebben, heb ik getracht hier te doen met de vlakken, die logisch uit de plastische vormen herleid zijn. Hierdoor kan het licht in 't interieur gebeeld worden." Huszar, "Over de moderne toegepaste kunsten," 76.

137. "Nog een voorbeeld hoe de nieuwe beelding zich realiseeren kan in zijn abstrakte vormen." Huszar, "Over de moderne toegepaste kunsten," 76

138. Nancy Troy, "Figures of Dance in De Stijl," *The Art Bulletin* 66, no. 4 (December 1984): 649–50.

example, Juliet Kinchin observed a broader cultural interest in the relationship between the staging and performance of a theatre production and the staged and performative nature of the interior, writing, "The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were a period of increasing fascination with the theater, and actors became paradigms of creative individuals who could reinvent themselves constantly, performing multiple identities and disrupting apparently stable categories. The domestic interior provided a vehicle for this kind of performative engagement with modernity."[139] For Huszar, the theater and the interior both functioned as experimental sites that could be actualized, and thus were locations in which De Stijl's vision of the "new man" could be conditioned by and performed within a rationally conceived chromatic environment guided by *gestemdheid*.

From Interior to Exterior: Van Doesburg in Drachten

In the early years of De Stijl, conceptualizing the interior as a heterotopic space reflected a practical need. The frequent limitations placed on their projects forced these artists to curtail their ambitions to produce a totalizing aesthetic transformation of the built environment. But De Stijl's early focus on the interior was not rooted entirely in necessity. The strategic emphasis on the interior presented an ideological counterpoint to what the artists felt to be one of the principal ethical, aesthetic, and philosophical failures of the stylistic eclecticism of the nineteenth century: an emphasis on the architectural surface at the expense of an underlying, truer form. Specifically at issue for De Stijl was a discrepancy between the attention given to the interior and the exterior of architecture, one that was perceived to have placed undue significance on the ornamental façade of

139. Juliet Kinchin, "Performance and the Reflected Self: Modern Stagings of Domestic Space, 1860–1914," *Studies in the Decorative Arts* 16, no. 1 (Fall–Winter 2008–9): 65.

buildings during the previous century.[140] It was argued that an overvaluation of the building's exterior led to the design of buildings—and their ornamentation—that emphasized a picturesque viewing from without, with little continuity or concern for those who occupied the spaces within. In his last text on architecture, written shortly before his death in 1931, Van Doesburg reflected on the developments in art and architecture since the previous century. In an important section focusing on space, he explained the turn artists and architects alike must take to upend this tradition in the future:

> Unlike frontal architecture, in which everything is concentrated on the façade, the architecture of the future will develop a richness of dimensions which we can only guess at today. The modern architect will not be satisfied with the two-dimensional idea projected on paper at his drawing board. Contrary to the two-dimensional understanding of the façade, the new task of the modern architect will be to conquer three-dimensional space.[141]

Van Doesburg had made these interests clear as early as 1917, when he stated: "Because the architect always remains bound to practice, his task consists in this: *to use space and to express its aesthetic relationships from within to without*."[142] Hence the De Stijl

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140. Critical in De Stijl's turn away from the façade and focus on the role of space within the built environment was the largely Germanic discourse on architectural space. Adrian Forty argued that such a tradition of spatial conception had developed in Germany in part as a result of the meaning of the German word for space, *Raum*, which suggests both an abstract, philosophical concept as well as a bounded, "material enclosure, a 'room.'" The Dutch *ruimte* shares a similar connotation, allowing for an easy assimilation of the concept into De Stijl theory. Forty, *Words and Buildings*, 256–57 (see chap. 2, n. 35).

141. Theo van Doesburg, "The Rebirth of Art and Architecture in Europe," in Van Straaten, *Theo van Doesburg*, 17. (Originally published as "Obnova umjetnosti i arhitekture u Europi," *Hrvatska Revija* 4, no. 8 [1931]: 419–32.)

142. "Daar de bouwkunstenaar altijd aan de praktijk gebonden blijft, bestaat zijn opgave hierin: de ruimte te benutten en in aestheetische verhoudingen ven binnen naar buiten te uitdrukken." Theo van Doesburg, "Bij de Bijlagen: II. J. J. P. Oud; Ontwerp voor een Complex van Huizen

interior, designated for the incubation of the "new man," was understood as the essential point of departure for the extension of De Stijl's project beyond the isolated and fragmentary nature of its early heterotopic spaces outward into the entirety of the built environment.

In 1921, Van Doesburg had the opportunity to expand the confined heterotopic spaces of his earlier interior designs outward onto the streets, through a collaboration with the architect Cornelis Rienks de Boer (1881–1966) on a row of middle-class houses, and opposite them an agricultural school, in the northern Dutch town of Drachten. The project, and Van Doesburg's color schemes, will be discussed at length in the following chapter. An important issue to be addressed now, however, was Van Doesburg's color schemes for the interiors of these buildings and their relationship to his exterior chromatic patterns. His designs for Drachten remain the most comprehensive surviving collection of drawings for an early architectural project. Hence they provide an excellent illustration of Van Doesburg's early career as an interior designer, especially as he ambitiously endeavored to move beyond the limited scope of his earlier projects.[143]

With the Drachten commission, Van Doesburg felt the need to move away from the subjective approach he had taken to applying color in previous projects, such as the De Lange house, for which he admitted that his color selection "was still tuned by feeling."[144] It was around this time, employing terminology similar to Huszar's, that Van

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voor een Strandboulevard" [At a glance: 2. J. J. P. Oud; Design for a complex of houses for a beach-side boulevard] *De Stijl* 1, no.1 (October 1917): 12.

143. Troy, *De Stijl Environment,* 91–92.

144. In a letter to J. J. P. Oud, August 14, 1919, Van Doesburg had already begun to experiment with mathematical color systems for the Sprangen blocks 1 and 5. He wrote, "[They are] better than in the vacation house, which were still tuned by feeling" [Beter als in 't vacantiehuis die nog

Doesburg argued, "Only by a more spiritual relation of man to nature (and we see this relation gradually coming into being) will he understand the *spiritual gestemdheid* that comes to expression as really and accurately as possible in *nieuwe beelding*."[145]

To arrive at the sensation of *gestemdheid* in the interior at Drachten, Van Doesburg dedicated himself to a systematic application of color. In an early letter to De Boer, while still courting the architect for a commission, Van Doesburg made clear the broader need for, and his dedication to, a rationalized application of color in the built environment: "With modern consciousness, one will be forced to realize a harmony between space, form and color. The choice of color is thus not arbitrary or accidental, but logically aesthetic. One will need to do this, depending on the specific demands of the space and the light."[146] When awarded the commission, the Drachten project presented a crucial opportunity for Van Doesburg to see his logical aesthetic actualized, and so he approached the project with intense focus and energy. The color schemes for the middle-class housing block were executed in exacting detail, as color was mapped onto every architectural feature of the interior.

The floor plans for the sixteen apartments in the block varied slightly. For clarity, I will focus upon one apartment for which a comprehensive group of color schemes

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op het gevoel gestemd waren.] In Hoek, *Theo van Doesburg: Oeuvre Catalogue,* 255 (see n. 89 above).

145. "Slechts bij een meer geestelijke verhouding van den mensch tot de natuur (en wij zien deze verhouding langzaamaan tot stand komen) zal hij de *geestelijke gestemdheid* die in de nieuwe beelding zoo reel en exact mogelijk tot uitdrukking komt, verstaan." Van Doesburg, "Antwoord aan Mejuffrouw Edith Pijpers," 67 (see chap. 1, n. 43).

146. "Met modern besef zal men genoodzaakt zijn een harmonie tusschen ruimte, vorm en kleur te verwerkelijken. De kleur-keuze is dus niet willekeurig of toevallig, maar logisch-aesthetic, het een zal dit, het ander dat behoeven al naar gelang de ruimte en het licht zulksch eischen." From a letter sent by Van Doesburg to De Boer on October 24, 1920. Reprinted in Hoek, *Theo van Doesburg,* 280.

exists.[147] The apartment consists of two stories. On the second floor (fig. 4.30) are three bedrooms (two facing the back garden and one facing the street), a loft, and a narrow stairwell leading up to a small garret. Van Doesburg produced a comprehensive diagram of the second-floor rooms. It included four developed surface interiors of each room displayed on the sheet next to a floor plan, which served as a compass to orient the location of the individual rooms (fig. 4.31). The use of multiple developed surface interiors is noteworthy. Van Doesburg conceived each room as an independent space, for which he provided a unique color scheme, centered, interestingly, around selections of wallpaper. The decision to use wallpaper reflected the socioeconomic status of the housing units' intended inhabitants. In his contemporaneous designs for the interiors of the Spangen working-class housing blocks—design by Oud and to be discussed in greater detail in chapter 4—Van Doesburg had refrained from using any wallpaper in order to reduce costs. Oud summarized their motivations for avoiding papering in an essay in *Bouwkundig Weekblad*:

> As a result of previous difficulties in obtaining good paperer's cloth and wallpaper, and also because it was regularly found that the moisture generated by washing and cooking in the living rooms or the condensation on the walls, attacked the wallpaper, rendered it unsightly or loosened it, the walls, by way of experiment, were provided at door-height with a picture rail below which the wall was rendered with colored mortar, and the area above it, like the ceiling, was finished in white plaster. . . . [T]he painterly color schemes of strongly contrasting

147. Thanks to the generosity of the staff at the Drachten Museum, notably Annamieke Keiser, I was able to visit this apartment on September 4, 2018. The Museum has undertaken an extensive project to restore it to its original appearance. A technical study of the project was published in Sjoerd van Faassen and Herman van Bergelijk, eds., *De briefwisseling tussen Theo van Doesburg en architect C. R. de Boer, 1920–1929* (Haarlem: Eigenbouwer, 2019).

> colors (yellow, grey, blue, black) devised for the interior by Theo van Doesburg in relation to this wall treatment makes wallpaper superfluous.[148]

While Van Doesburg followed this practice in the kitchen and the surrounding rooms at Drachten—areas where the above-described damage was likely—the second-story bedroom spaces proved to be free of such worries.[149] Further, he insisted that wallpaper was in fact an economical solution for the middle-class inhabitants, as the paper could be replaced affordably in the event of any needed alterations.[150]

While working on the project from Weimar, Germany, where he had settled as he attempted to make inroads into the Bauhaus, Van Doesburg had come across satisfying wallpaper designs sold by Paul Dehne (1888–1979).[151] The wallpaper he chose varied in

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148. It is important to note that Oud viewed this fundamentally as an experimental cost-saving measure, about which there was still some debate. He continued, "There has been conflicting experience with this in various cities: it is claimed that it is more difficult to maintain than wallpaper because, in general, it is easier to hang new paper than to repair plasterwork. It is also said that the flat color of the walls shows the dirt more than vari-colored wallpaper where the decorative patterns absorb and conceal a multitude of imperfections. The ideal solution would be a hard, smooth, colored surface that is washable." See J. J. P. Oud, "Gemeentelijk Vilkswoningbouw polder 'Spangen,' Rotterdam" [Municipal social housing, 'Spangen' polder, Rotterdam], *Bouwkundig Weekblad* 41 (1920): 37. Repr. and trans. in *J. J. P. Oud, Poetic Functionalist: The Complete Works, 1890–1963*, ed. Ed Taverne, Cor Wagenaar, and Martien de Vletter (Rotterdam: NAi, 2001), 226.

149. In a letter dated August 18, 1921, Van Doesburg wrote to De Boer stating that the kitchen should be free of wallpaper. Reprinted in Hoek, *Theo van Doesburg*, 281.

150. "Colored wallpaper is much cheaper than paint. An added advantage is the rooms can be altered quite cheaply." Letter from Van Doesburg to De Boer, August 12, 1921. Repr. and trans. in Van Straaten, *Theo van* Doesburg, 78.

151. In Van doesburg's correspondence with De Boer he references a firm "Dehele." This was likely a misspelling and may have in fact been a reference to Paul Dehne, owner of Rudolf Westphal Nachf., located at Geleitstrasse 3a in Weimar. The store sold wallpaper, along with carpeting and linoleum. See Van Faassen and Van Bergelijk, *De briefwisseling tussen Theo van Doesburg en architect C. R. de Boer, 1920–1929*, 104 (see n. 3 above). In a letter from Van Doesburg to De Boer, dated August 12, 1921, the artists informed the architect that he had acquired 160 rolls of what would eventually be 570. Reprinted in Hoek, *Theo van Doesburg*, 282. See also Van Straaten, *Theo van Doesburg*, 77. The writings on Van Doesburg's agitational time in the orbit of the Bauhaus, its faculty, and students, are vast. For a brief summary of this period, see Doris Wintgens Hötte, "Van Doesburg Tackles the Continent: Passion, Drive, and

shades of gray and white, and consisted of a subtle patterns of waving lines or woven grids.[152] Van Doesburg conceptualized his use of wallpaper not in its conventional and gendered framework, which Juliet Kinchin summarized as follows: "In covering the cracks and blemishes, disguising the 'true' nature of the wall, [wallpaper] was often presented, like furniture veneers or like women's cosmetics, as insincere, superficial, a way of 'dressing up' rooms to appear what they were not."[153] Rather, Van Doesburg conceived of wallpaper in purely chromatic terms, on an equal footing with the colors he directly applied to the wall. In fact, because the wallpaper was to occupy much of the wall space on the second floors, they would become the foundation for a systematic calibration of the colors for each room.[154] Van Doesburg sent De Boer a number of small cards which matched triads of carefully balanced samples of primary colors in differing hues with specific swatches of wallpaper (fig. 4.32). The matching triad of primary colors was then distributed throughout the room based upon his proportional system of 3:5:8.[155] Each card was labeled "color harmony," and assigned a specific number. The choice of

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Calculation," in *Van Doesburg and the International Avant-Garde: Constructing a New World*, ed. Gladys Fabre and Doris Wintgens Hötte (London: Tate, 2009), 10–19.

152. His choice of such a simplified design followed a broader prewar trend, spurred by the reform movement that advocated for an avoidance of the ornate patterning of nineteenth-century wallpaper. See Jan Jennings, "Controlling Passion: The Turn-of-the-Century Wallpaper Dilemma," *Winterthur Portfolio* 31, no. 4 (Winter 1996): 243–64. Van Doesburg's investigation into wallpaper designs predated those of the Bauhaus by nearly half a decade. See Ridler, "Bauhaus Wall Painting Workshop," 229–81 (see n. 8 above).

153. Juliet Kinchin, "Wallpaper Design," in *Bauhaus: Workshops for Modernity, 1919–1933*, ed. Barry Bergdoll and Leah Dickerman (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2009), 292.

154. "I can now work systematically and adjust my color to the colors of these wallpapers" [Ik kan nu systematisch te werk gaan en mijn kleur stemmen op de kleuren dezer behangsels]. From a letter written by Van Doesburg to De Boer, August 12, 1921. In Hoek, *Theo van Doesburg*, 282.

155. This ratio was not arbitrary. As I will argue in chapter 5, this proportional system was likely adopted from contemporaneous theories on ornament.

the title for these cards was likely a direct reference to the color theory of Ostwald.[156] Accompanying these cards was a larger diagram, listing each wallpaper sample with an assigned number and corresponding color harmony (fig. 4.33). The scrupulous detail with which Van Doesburg produced and organized his color combinations was to ensure the exact application of specific colors in each room, according to the unique conditions of each space. For example, in the garden-facing second-floor bedroom (labeled as bedroom "B" in fig. 4.30), Van Doesburg specifically applied "wallpaper no. 10" to the walls, while applying its corresponding color harmony to the ceilings, doors, and windows (fig. 4.34). He selected this darker, gray wallpaper—allowing it to cover the entirety of the wall—in order to counteract the direct sunlight the room received. Whereas in the street-facing, darker bedroom, he used a lighter wallpaper, framed by a white-painted border, to ensure even greater brightness in the space (fig. 4.35).[157]

For the ground floor, as mentioned above, Van Doesburg avoided the use of wallpaper and instead applied planes of paint in various hues of primary colors directly onto the walls and floor. A ground plan, although difficult to read, provides a complete overview of the application of color to the floor (fig. 4.36).[158] The unusual means by

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156. Doig, *Theo van Doesburg,* 86–87 (see chap. 1, n. 14).

157. Van Doesburg explained to De Boer in a letter on August 12, 1921: "In principle, for the darkest rooms I have used the lightest wallpaper, and for the darker rooms the lightest wallpapers" [Principeel worden voor de donkerste vertrekken de lichtste, voor de lichtste vertrekken de meer donker behangsels genomen]. In Hoek, *Theo van Doesburg*, 282.

158. The entrance to the apartment under discussion is located at the bottom center of the drawing, just to the left of the blue bay windows marked with the capital letter *J*. One enters the apartment through a small foyer marked by the blue square on the floor. Ahead to the left is the staircase, which leads to the second floor. Immediately on one's right is the front room that faces the street. A fireplace is located in the upper-right corner of the room. This front room is separated from a back room by a pair of pocket doors painted in white and yellow. In the back room there are two built-in cabinets—one in red, the other blue—on either side of the pocket doors, a second fireplace to the right, and French doors flanked by two additional windows that open onto the back garden. In Van Doesburg's drawing, the garden is delineated by the grouping

which Van Doesburg chose to represent the color schemes for the floor of the apartment likely came from his interactions with the Wall Painting Workshop at the Bauhaus. In a letter to De Boer in August 1921, he described the drawing as a "through-distribution" of color—possibly to imply the subject physically passing through the chromatic space. He explained further, in a letter to De Boer, "This through-distribution of your architecture has been greatly admired by young architects etc. here [in Weimar]. This drawing will very likely be used for the theater in Jena, of which Adolph Maijer [sic] is the architect."[159] It was at this exact moment, when Van Doesburg was designing these color schemes, that Oskar Schlemmer (1888–1943) and the Wall Painting Workshop were given the task of providing the interior color schemes for the renovation of the Jena Municipal Theater (1921), supervised by Walter Gropius (1883–1969) and Adolf Meyer (1881–1929).[160] Although Van Doesburg would later come to criticize Schlemmer's design—leading to its removal from the theater—the early stage of creative planning for the project likely stimulated his experimentation with methods for representing his color schemes for interiors.

The influence of Van Doesburg's time in Germany was also visible in his color schemes for the walls of the first floor of the apartment. Though he used a variation of the developed surface interior to depict the colors of the built-in features of the kitchen (fig.

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of red, blue, black, and two yellow rectilinear forms. Just to the left of the back room is the kitchen, on the floor of which Van Doesburg laid out three black rectangular forms. Through a red and white painted door, one walks into a small exterior hallway with a blue floor, attached to which is a small outhouse with a black plane on the floor and red toilet. Finally, at the end of the hall is a small attached shed which opens onto the garden.

159. Trans. in Van Straaten, *Theo van Doesburg*, 78.

160. Magdalena Droste, *Bauhaus, 1919–1933* (Cologne: Taschen, 2002), 110–11. For a detailed summary of the project see Ulrich Müller, *Walter Gropius: Das Jenaer Theater* (Cologne: König,

4.37), he also chose to represent the walls of all of the rooms together in a continuous band—the top portion of the band consisting of the kitchen and back room, while the bottom portion corresponded to the front room (fig. 4.38). The boundaries of each section of wall were marked with letters corresponding to the floor plan below, and were demarcated by an undulating series of semicircular pencil lines. The color scheme marked a possible reimagination of the interior by Van Doesburg. Now in Drachten, he was afforded the entirety of an interior to actualize his aesthetic vision. It appears in this work that he no longer had to imagine each room as the hermetic, self-contained entity that had previously necessitated the use of the developed surface interior. Rather, now the walls of each room unfurl cinematically into one another.

The impetus for this filmic thinking likely emerged from Van Doesburg's interaction with the Swedish artist Viking Eggeling (1880–1925) and his German counterpart Hans Richter (1888–1976), whose work had been a principal motivating force behind Van Doesburg's departure for Germany in 1920. From 1919 to 1920, the two artists appropriated the Japanese *maikimono* format of scroll painting to explore temporality and movement in their abstract compositions (fig. 4.39).[161] As the long sheets of paper were unrolled, collections of geometric shapes would morph and change their appearance. These artistic experiments would certainly have been on Van Doesburg's mind while he was working on his Drachten interiors. During that summer in 1921, in the July issue of *De Stijl,* he published Hans Richter's essay "Principles of Kinetic Art," as well as reproductions of Eggeling's *Horizontal-Vertical Mass* (1919; fig. 4.40) and

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2006). For a perspective on the project centered on the Wall Painting Workshop, see Ridler, "Bauhaus Wall Painting Workshop," 70–86.

Richter's *Präludium* (1919; fig. 4.41).[162] The influence of their experimental works made an impact not merely on Van Doesburg's conception of the interiors of the middle-class housing block. Nancy Troy has argued there was also a homology between the scroll-like unfurling of his exterior color schemes and the contemporaneous works produced by Eggeling and Richter.[163]

At Drachten, the interconnectedness of the interior and exterior color schemes marked a significant advancement in Van Doesburg's goal to realize a totalizing environment. Both Troy and Allan Doig have observed that for the middle-class housing block, Van Doesburg sought to bridge the divide between interior and exterior by establishing a continuity of color through the liminal spaces of the building's windows and their frames.[164] For example, in the floor plans for both the first and second floors of the middle-class houses, Van Doesburg marked these thresholds with specific colors which he intended to apply to both the interior and exterior frames of the windows. In choosing to do so, the artist established an interrelated system throughout his color schemes which united the interior with the exterior. According to Van Doesburg's logic, each window frame was predicated on the exact color harmony that was selected for the specific characteristics of each interior space. Thus the colors that comprise the chromatic patterning on the exterior of the building—to be discussed at length in chapter 5—are entirely predetermined by the interior color schemes from which they extend. This

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161. Gladys Fabre, "A Universal Language for the Arts: Interdisciplinarity as a Practice, Film as a Model," in Fabre and Hötte, *Van Doesburg,* 46–57 (see n. 151 above).

162. Hans Richter, "Prinzipielles zur Bewegungskunst," *De Stijl* 4, no. 7 (July 1921): 109–12.

163. Troy, *De Stijl Environment*, 92. Van Doesburg's interest in the unfolding of space and time appeared in a number of instances at Drachten, including small details such as small black square painted across multiple steps of the staircase. The square only becomes whole once the staircase is traversed and the viewer takes a specific position on the second floor.

interrelation of the various architectural color schemes even extended into the realm of landscape architecture, where Van Doesburg marshaled his triadic color ratio of 3:5:8 to guide his designs for his gardens (fig. 4.42). In an explanation to De Boer, he wrote: "The starting point is the architectural layout, which is continued in the layout of the flower beds . . . a harmonic solution of the 3 primary colors in the ratio 8 (blue) 5 (red) 3 (yellow). . . ."[165] As a result, the location of each and every color in the project, as Van Doesburg wished, became part of a larger rationally interconnected system intended to thwart any slippage into the appearance of an arbitrary or superficial application of color.

Van Doesburg's expansion of his chromatic schemes from the interior to the exterior was continued in the agricultural school facing the middle-class housing block. Only a single floor plan illustrating the interior color schemes remains of the ground floor and cellar (fig. 4.43). Although the drawing conveys a limited portion of Van Doesburg's vision for the interiors, it provides insight into his evolving experimentation.[166] He began and finished the project after the color schemes for the housing block, and attempted to build on his previous designs while seeking to maintain a unity between the two architectural projects.[167] Notably, following Ostwald, he employed the secondary colors of green, orange, and violet to harmonize with the primary colors of the housing block. Additionally, leaning increasingly on mathematics, the interior colors, like those of the exterior, were distributed according to the proportion of 3:5:8. Van Doesburg felt that the

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164. Troy, *De Stijl Environment*, 92; Doig, *Theo Van Doesburg*, 99–100.

165. From a letter sent by Van Doesburg to De Boer, October 30, 1921. "Uitgegaan is van de architectonische indeling, welke in de indeling der perken is voortgezet . . . een harmonische oplossing der 3 primaire kleuren in der verhouding 8 (blauw) 5 (rood) 3 (geel) . . . ." Repr. in Hoek, *Van Doesburg*, 290.

166. Doig, *Theo van Doesburg,* 101.

167. Doig, *Theo van Doesburg*, 100.

triad would allow the interior to facilitate the education of the students attending courses in the building. In a letter to De Boer, he stated, "As far as the classroom goes, why shouldn't the students be allowed to look at the three secondary colors, orange, violet, and green, instead of brown or some other muddy color? I am convinced that it will make their time spent at the school much more agreeable."[168] Additionally, with the agricultural school the artist sought to establish a more dynamic relationship between the interior and exterior color schemes, by painting the window frames of the building two distinct colors on their interior and exterior sides. In spite of the differing exterior and interior applications of color, the color schemes remained dependent upon one another. Both were subject to the proportional system of distribution Van Doesburg developed for each Drachten building, and as a result, at least in theory, the placement of each color in the interior or on the façade remained inextricably linked by his systematic approach.[169]

Conclusion

Very quickly after they were implemented, Van Doesburg's color schemes for Drachten met public opposition. The local art critic Herman Martin led the charge against the project, arguing in a series of articles published in the *Dragster Courant* that the artist's schemes clashed with the character of De Boer's architectural style, thereby producing an undesirable effect.[170] Van Doesburg tried to weather the storm of worsening public

168. From a letter dated January 8, 1921 (although likely 1922). Qouted and translated in Doig, *Theo van Doesburg*, 98.

169. In a letter to De Boer, dated February 17, 1922, Van Doesburg wrote regarding the application of the colors to the agricultural school by the contracted painters. He emphasized, "First he has to know the *system*, then there won't be any problems—and above all keep the correct colors." Quoted and translated in Doig, *Theo van Doesburg*, 100.

170. Over the course of his essays, Martin also attacked the interior color schemes that forced inhabitants to abandon their own tastes and adopt those of Van Doesburg in order to comport with

sentiment towards the project. Traveling to Drachten in December 1921, he delivered a lecture in defense of his experimental integration of color and architecture.[171] In spite of his efforts, the Drachten buildings—which had come to be pejoratively referred to as the parrot neighborhood (*papegaaienbuurt*)—were stripped of Van Doesburg's color schemes and repainted in 1922, the year after their completion.[172] The project, however, sent Van Doesburg down a path of further experimentation with the unification of the interior and exterior of architecture through the chromatic opening up of space.

As he was completing his work for Drachten, he had begun discussions about designing a country home with the Parisian gallerist Léonce Rosenberg (1879–1947). While his encounter with Rosenberg did not culminate in an actualized architectural work, it did lead to the first exhibition of De Stijl architecture and interior design in 1923, at which Van Doesburg exhibited radical new architectural designs created in collaboration with Cornelis van Eesteren.[173] The designs, most notably made for the Maison Particulière (1923; fig. 4.44), made use of axonometric projection to depict the creation of architectural space through the intersection of horizontal and vertically oriented planar walls of color. Several of the drawings, labeled *Contra-Constructions* (1923; fig. 4.45), convey Van Doesburg's continued attempt to reconceptualize

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the decoration. Martin set off a public debate on the project with his article, "De Middenstandswoningen" [The middle-class houses], *Dragster Courant* (October 11, 1921). Rinsema published a letter to the editor in response. This prompted Martin to publish a serialized essay entitled "Moderne Kunst," which appeared in the *Dragster Courant* between October 21 and November 11, 1921. See Troy, *De Stijl Environment*, 97, n. 43.

171. No transcription of the lecture, "De kleur van onze woning" [The color of our housing], exists. A summary of the lecture was published in the *Dragster Courant* on December 23, 1921. For a fuller discussion of these events see Doig, *Theo van Doesburg*, 101–2.

172. Doig, *Theo van Doesburg*, 102.

173. For an overview of this project, see Troy, *De Stijl Environment*, 103–21 and Van Straaten, *Theo van Doesburg*, 108–42.

architectural form. The arrangements of intersecting axonometric colored planes complicate the distinction between interior and exterior, as planes can be read as existing both within and without the building. As Van Doesburg and his other De Stijl colleagues became increasingly concerned with bridging the divide between interior and exterior, the prevalence of the developed surface interior waned during the 1920s. The drawing method, however, was not entirely discarded, as Van der Leck and Van Doesburg continued to employ the technique on occasion in later interior design projects—notably, though, for individual rooms.

The persistence of the developed surface interior in De Stijl practice exemplifies the drawing method's importance to the group. The rejuvenation of this anachronistic method of architectural drawing by De Stijl artists was motivated precisely because of its capacity for erasure. By eliminating all information regarding the context in which an interior exists, and focusing all emphasis on the room itself, the developed surface interior provided a critical formal and conceptual tool with which the group could construct a new, modern interior unrestrained by an already extant architectural setting. This was crucial during the group's formative years, when the scale of its projects was limited. Furthermore, the hermetic nature of the interiors conceived by De Stijl artists and described through the developed surface interior shares a structural homology with what Michel Foucault has theorized as heterotopic space. De Stijl's interior designs were intended to function as important liminal sites that could initiate the conditioning of, and transition toward, a modern, masculine subject capable of rebuilding European society after the destruction of the war.

5 Pattern as Model: De Stijl, Ornament, and Abstraction

In 1921, Theo van Doesburg sent J. J. P. Oud a group of color schemes (fig. 5.1) for the exterior of a working-class housing project in Rotterdam of the architect's design. The schemes employed a system of triangular and semicircular lines to generate an alternating pattern of yellow, blue, green, and black painted window frames and doors along the building's façade. Van Doesburg's intention was to counter the dominant horizontality of the housing block with a chromatic "dissonance" which he thought necessary to enliven viewers' experience of the building as they passed in front. Oud, who had recently been appointed municipal architect in Rotterdam, was constrained by the limits of his governmental position and rejected Van Doesburg's ideas. The architect's response prompted the latter to write in no uncertain terms: "You want to change the whole thing and murder one of my most successful solutions. . . . Given the fact that I am no house painter but take these things very seriously; given the fact that I am Van Doesburg, *I have, I seize* the right to cry: *NO–NO–NO*."[1]

Equating Van Doesburg's protestation with a rejection of any affiliation with ornamentation and the decorative arts in general, art historians have used his declaration against becoming a "house painter" to reinforce a modernist schism within the literature on De Stijl which separated its members into the ideological and aesthetic polarities of painter versus architect. This categorical approach has positioned De Stijl as one of the principal antagonists of ornament within the modernist narrative of interwar functionalism. But to place De Stijl within such a narrative, art historians have drawn

largely on the more acerbic writings of the group's members, such as Oud, from the 1920s, when several of the group's former members had become involved in establishing the International Style, through the charters of CIAM.[2] Such a narrative, however, has failed to address with the necessary subtlety De Stijl's early engagement with ornament and its theorization.

In their own writings, De Stijl artists used the term "ornament" in a broader sense, to denote a specific nineteenth-century practice of stylistic eclecticism—discussed at length in previous chapters—which they disparaged as superficial when applied to architecture; and more damningly, temporally anachronistic in the modern era.[3] Their theory of *nieuwe beelding* was intended as a unified replacement for this outmoded form

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1. Letter from Theo van Doesburg to J. J. P. Oud, November 3, 1921. Quoted and translated in Troy, *De Stijl Environment*, 85–86 (see chap. 2, n. 47).

2. Oud published an early and important functionalist essay, "Over de toekomstige bouwkunst en hare architectonische mogelijkheden" [On future architecture and its architectonic possibilities], *Bouwkundig Weekblad* 42, no. 24 (June 11, 1921): 147–60.

3. "The concept of monumentality has changed considerably in favor of the feeling of style, since architects no longer delight in the capricious play of the Baroque with its excesses and excrescences. . . . Our spiritual era no longer allows for puppets to be painted on the wall—preferably applied with an applicable maxim . . . in the manner of candy-wrapper adages—and with no organic connection with the wall, to be regarded as monumental painting suitable to this zeitgeist. . . . The 'styling' of the natural form into ornamental form, based upon the sensory, plastic-less observation of natural form and upon natural symmetry and natural multiplication, has nothing to do with plasticism *through aesthetic relationships deriving from inwardness*" (De opvatting der monumentaliteit heft zich sinds de architecten zich niet meer verlustigden aan het grilling spel van het Barok met zijn uitwassen en uitvloeisels, belangrijk ten gunste van het stijlgevoel gewijzigd. . . . Onze geestelijke dracht laat niet meer toe, poppetjes op een muur geschilderd,—liefst nog met een toepasselijke spreuk er bij . . . op de wijze der ulevellenspreuken,—en met dien muur in geen enkel organisch verband staande, voor, aan den tijdgeest evenredige, monumentale schilderkunst aan te zien. . . . Het 'styleeren' van natuurvorm tot ornamentvorm, gegrond op zinnelijke beeldinglooze waarneming van natuurvorm, op natuurlijke symmetrie en vermenigvuldiging op de wijze der natuur, heft met beelding *door aesthetische verhoudingen van innerlijkheid uit*, niets te maken). Theo van Doesburg, "Aanteekeningen over Monumentale Kunst: Naar Aanleiding van twee Bouwfragmenten (Hall in Vacantieheuis te Noordwijkerhout. Bijlage I)" [Notes on monumental art: In response to two building fragments (A hall in the vacation house in Noordwijkerhout. Example 1)], *De Stijl* 2, no. 1 (November 1918): 11.

of ornamentation, not as a complete rejection of the importance of ornament itself. Yet their quest to resolve stylistic eclecticism in the built environment was not an isolated endeavor among modernist movements. Such criticism of the ornamental practice of the previous century was widespread. Many competing design groups drew upon emerging, academically rooted theories of ornamentation to develop their own unifying aesthetic programs for the modern era. To ignore ornament in the analysis of De Stijl, especially during the group's early development, is to exclude a critical body of polemics and ideas against which its artists were responding.

To challenge the traditional binary understanding of De Stijl, this chapter will examine the group's engagement with theories of ornament in general, and patterning specifically, in the years after the First World War. It will focus primarily on the work of Van Doesburg, as he was most prolific in both writings and artistic production during this period, although the work of Vilmos Huszar and Bart van der Leck will also garner attention. I will argue that the pedagogical tradition of theories of ornament—ubiquitous in arts and craft schools throughout the Netherlands, and Europe more broadly, by the turn of the century—played a role in shaping the approach these artists took in conceiving their earliest monumental works of mosaic, tile, glass, and paint. Specifically, while scholars have devoted much attention to tracing the origins of De Stijl's austere program of flat, geometric abstraction to cubism, I will present theories of ornament as a concurrent aesthetic impulse which would also have stimulated the the group's inclination toward geometric abstraction in the interior. Finally, it will be shown that with these projects, De Stijl wished to transcend conventional ornamental signifiers of national

identity, in order to create an aesthetic space capable of conditioning the vision and the nature of a modern, universal subject.

Modern Theories of Ornament in the Netherlands

Van Doesburg's heated exchange with Oud attests to the importance of the aesthetic goals that he felt were at stake with his Rotterdam designs. These stakes had been raised by a broader debate on the nature of Dutch design in which De Stijl was involved in the years following the First World War. The cataclysm of the war, however, was not the catalyst of this debate. Rather, the question concerning how a specifically modern Dutch style would emerge and what form it would take had already been present in the country for more than half a century. The spark for the modern movement in the decorative arts in the Netherlands was the exhibition "Art Applied to Industry" ("Kunst toegepast op Nijverheid"), held at the Palace of Industry in Amsterdam in 1877 (figs. 5.2, 5.3).[4] Organized by the Society of Factory and Handworkers Industry (Vereeniging van Fabrieks- en Handwerksnijverheid), the fair was intended to highlight examples from all the finest Dutch manufacturers of decorative objects. The goal was to compare advances in decorative arts in the Netherlands to those of its international competitors.[5] The Dutch

4. Jan de Bruijn, "De Leer van het Ornament" [The theory of ornament], in *Art Nouveau in Nederland*, ed. Jan de Bruijn (The Hague: Geementemuseum, 2018), 37.

5. The layout of the exhibition was organized by the architect J. R. de Ruyff (1844–1923), who divided the Dutch entries into twenty-two rooms named after cities in the Netherlands. See Titus Eliëns, "The National Industrial Exhibitions in the Netherlands in the 19th Century," in Reyer, *Industry and Design in the Netherlands*, 44–56 (see chap. 1, n. 15). For a more detailed review of industrial fairs in the Netherlands during the nineteenth century, see Titus M. Eliëns, *Kunst, Nijverheid, Kunstnijverheid: De Nationale nijverheidstentoonstellingen als spiegel van de Nederlandse kunstnijverheid in de negentiende eeuw* [Art, industry, applied arts: The national industrial exhibitions as a mirror of Dutch art in the nineteenth century] (Zutphen, Netherlands: Walburg Pers, 1990).

works on display drew disparaging reviews from the jury and critics alike.[6] At issue was the lack of a coherent, modern Dutch style conveyed by these objects, which instead comprised an eclectic mix of historical styles. For example, Adolf le Comte (1850–1921), a well-known professor of ornament at the Technical University of Delft, complained that the works submitted by the famous Dutch architect Pierre Cuypers (1827–1921) "followed a little too faithfully the art of three centuries ago."[7] Ornament became a focus of these critiques, as the works of furniture and design on display became reified objects through which serious questions concerning the uncertain position of the Netherlands within an emerging global cultural and economic order were addressed.

In response, a national commission was formed the following year to evaluate the state of the decorative arts in the Netherlands. The committee modeled its approach on that of the Department of Science and Art (DSA) and the South Kensington Museum in Great Britain, both of which had been formed following a wave of similar cultural, economic, and political concerns in the wake of the Great Exhibition in 1851.[8] Like its British counterparts, the committee made education the focal point for resolving the deficiencies of both skill and taste within the decorative arts. Its aim was to spearhead the formation of arts and crafts museums that would house additional resources, such as libraries, practical workshops, classrooms, and public lecture halls, among other

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6. The jury in its report searched for new avenues through which Dutch design could advance itself in the wake of the exhibition. See *Rapport over de Bekroning door de Nationale Jury van de Toonstelling van Kunst toegepast op Nijverheid* [Report on the award by the national jury of the exhibition of art applied to industry] (Amsterdam: C. L. Brinkman, 1877).

7. ". . . te getrouw de kunst van voor driee eeuwen gevolgd." Adolf le Comte, *Binnen- en buitenlandsche kunstnijverheid: Beschouwingen in verband met de tentoonstelling te Amsterdam* [Domestic and foreign industrial arts: Reflections in connection with the exhibition at Amsterdam] (Amsterdam: C. L. Brinkman, 1877), 32–33.

8. Eliëns, "National Industrial Exhibitions," 54–55.

amenities, in order to assure the proper education of both craftsmen and the public.[9] Following the 1877 exhibition, an initiative to carry out the committee's recommendation was undertaken, leading to the establishment of a number of schools dedicated to the decorative arts within the Netherlands. The Society for the Promotion of Industry (Maatschappij ter Bevordering van Nijverheid) founded the Museum of Applied Arts (Museum van Kunstnijverheid) in Haarlem in 1877, adding a technical school to the institution in 1879.[10] The Quellinus School for the Applied Arts and Drawing (Kunstnijverheid-Teekenschool Quellinus)—which had begun as a workshop during the construction of the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam to train artisans due to a lack of available skilled labor—was founded the same year.[11] In 1881, the government followed suit, establishing two additional schools in Amsterdam: the National School for Applied Art (Rijksschool voor Kunstnijverheid) and the National School for Design Teachers (Rijksnormaalschool voor Teekenonderwijzers).

These institutions adopted many of the pedagogical models established by the English reform movement. Drawing, for example, held pride of place in their curriculum. As Arindam Dutta notes, this pedagogical approach shifted attention away from craft skills no longer required in the mechanized production of decorative objects (fig. 5.4). In place of these technical skills, drawing offered to bridge the divide between the industrial

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9. Adi Martis has outlined in great detail the committee's recommendation in her important article, "Het ontstaan van het kunstnijverheidsonderwijs in Nederland en de geschiedenis van de Quellinusschool te Amsterdam (1879–1924)" [The emergence of arts and crafts education in the Netherlands and the history of the Quellinus School, Amsterdam (1879–1924)], *Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek (NKJ)/Netherlands Yearbook for History of Art* 30 (1979): 86.

10. Jeroen van de Eijnde, "From Royal Life Drawing to a Universal Morphology," in *Design Derby: Netherlands-Belgium 1815–2015*, ed. Frank Huygens and Mienke Simon Thomas (Rotterdam: Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, 2015), 97–107.

11. Martis, "Kunstnijverheidsonderwijs in Nederland," 62.

worker in the metropolis and the rural or colonial artisan, by making accessible to both a universalizing language of draftsmanship.[12] This de-emphasis on material craft can be seen in the curriculum of the National School for Applied Arts during this period, which stated:

> A future furniture maker will not learn to saw wood etc. But a furniture maker will learn to draw and design furniture; a smith will learn to make studies of the shapes he later intends to forge; a decorator will encounter the most beautiful ornamentation and will be able to practice the independent combination of modern designs that meet the requirements of sophisticated tastes.[13]

No longer tethered to the rote process of acquiring a craft skill, students were increasingly encouraged to discover such "modern designs" not through historical precedent, but through invention.

In restructuring the academic curriculum of design schools to suit the conceptual realm of the draftsman, further attention was devoted to theory. Ornament garnered particular focus as the rise of mechanical production severed the historical link that connected the materiality of an object with its ornamental design. These theoretical discourses probed the history, nature, and role of ornament in order to establish new principles for its creation. Intended to be used by students of design, the goal of such principles was to promote the unification of ornament with advanced methods of industrial manufacturing in order to create an aesthetic suitable for a modern society. Such programs on ornament were disseminated through theoretical guidebooks, the most widespread of which were grammars of ornament. This pedagogical genre originated

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12. Arindam Dutta, *The Bureaucracy of Beauty: Design in the Age of Its Global Reproducibility* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 7.

with *The Grammar of Ornament*, published by British architect Owen Jones in 1856.[14] A member of the British reform movement and an important figure in the DSA, Jones viewed ornament as instrumental in his project to bridge the gap between society and culture. As Stacey Sloboda argued:

> According to Jones and his colleagues, unreformed mid-nineteenth-century design failed to perform its modernity, tending instead to provide naturalistic illusions that were unrelated to either the circumstances of production (the machine) or its intended sites (flat architectural space). Their brand of design reform was concerned with this performative aspect of decoration and saw flat, geometric forms abstracted from nature as an enactment of imperial and industrial, or in their words, 'scientific', modernity.[15]

With *The Grammar of Ornament*, Jones presented a reconceptualization of the nature and role of ornament within a built environment increasingly conditioned by industrial manufacturing and international commerce.

Anti-illusionism was critical in accomplishing this goal. According to Jones's theory, decoration remained subordinate to the architectural work or object to which it was applied.[16] Hence he viewed the practice of presenting illusionistic depictions of gardens on a wall or clouds on a ceiling, for example, as anathema to such a hierarchy, because doing so obfuscated the underlying structure of the building itself. Furthermore, such illusionistic ornamentation grounded in naturalism—as advocated by his contemporary, Ruskin—ran counter to Jones's effort to establish a theory of ornament on

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13. De Bruijn, "De Leer van het Ornament," 40.

14. Owen Jones, *The Grammar of Ornament* (London: Day and Sons, 1856).

15. Stacey Sloboda, "'The Grammar of Ornament': Cosmopolitanism and Reform in British Design," *Journal of Design History* 21, no. 3 (Autumn 2008): 227.

entirely rational and universal principles.[17] As Jones stated in *The Grammar of Ornament*: "Flowers or other natural objects should not be used as ornaments, but conventional representations founded upon them sufficiently suggestive to convey the intended image to the mind, without destroying the unity of the object they are employed to decorate. *Universally obeyed in the best periods of Art, equally violated when Art declines*."[18]

Jones—influenced by contemporary theories of scientific materialism—advocated replacing optical illusionism with a logical system of ornament akin to that of language, as reflected in the title of his book. Ornament, according to Jones, was not generated or applied arbitrarily. Rather, it had historically followed a set of rules that recalled those of grammar. The book consisted of two sections: the first, a set of thirty-seven "propositions" or guiding principles; and the second, a typological study of paradigmatic examples of historical and "oriental" ornamentation, lavishly illustrated with one hundred chromolithographic plates (figs. 5.5a–5.5c). Through this anthropological approach, he argued that beneath the surface of all ornamental pattern lay a universalizing *Ursprache* of geometric forms, which could then be objectively and scientifically studied, and thus subsequently taught.[19] "The principles are everywhere the same," he wrote, "the forms

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16. Jones's first proposition read: "The Decorative Arts arise from, and should properly be attendant upon, Architecture." Jones, *The Grammar of Ornament*, 4.

17. For further discussion, see Nicholas Frankel, "The Ecstasy of Decoration: *The Grammar of Ornament* as Embodied Experience," *Nineteenth-Century Art Worldwide* 2, no. 1 (Winter 2003). http://www.19thc-artworldwide.org/ winter03/246-the-ecstasy-of-decoration-the-grammar-of-ornament-as-embodied-experience.

18. Emphasis in original. Jones, *Grammar of Ornament*, 4–5. See also Carole Hrvol Flores, *Owen Jones: Design, Ornament, Architecture, and Theory in an Age in Transition* (New York: Rizzoli, 2006), 77.

19. Remí Lambrusse, "Grammars of Ornament: Dematerialization and Embodiment from Owen Jones to Paul Klee," in *Histories of Ornament: From Global to Local*, ed. Gülru Necipoglu and

only differ."[20] As a result, Jones argued that students of ornament should not copy their designs directly from nature or past historical styles, but instead must look beyond taxonomies of styles to their underlying universal structure, rooted in geometry. With ornament conceived from and guided by a system of mathematics, new patterns and motifs no longer bound to mimeticism could be invented.[21]

Invention became Jones's most lasting pedagogical legacy for students of design and ornament. Following *The Grammar of Ornament*, numerous other volumes were published throughout Europe, including Eduard Jacobthal's *Grammatik der Ornamente* (1874) in Germany and Jules Bourgoin's *Grammaire élémentaire de l'ornement* (1880) in France. As Remí Lambrusse explained:

> Unlike the vocabularies of motifs, these grammars insisted that ornamental patterns, as shown in their plates, had no specific iconicity in and of themselves. Practitioners were urged not to repeat what was in the book but were left free to invent their own "unknown forms" and compositions, in the same way as it was left to speakers to employ the relevant grammatical rules in order to express themselves. . . . In other words decorators were not technically trained in any specific practice but introduced theoretically to a pure *praxis*: they were taught to become independent authors of graphic forms by a theory of action rather than by a set of repeatable tricks; so were the artists of the applied arts established as thinkers as much as makers.[22]

Alina Payne (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016): 324–26. See also Sloboda, "'Grammar of Ornament,'" 226.

20. Owen Jones, *On the True and False in the Decorative Arts: Lectures Delivered at Marlborough House, June 1852* (London: Strangeways and Walden, 1863), 101.

21. It must be noted that while his text opened up the possibility of new forms of ornamentation, he did not advocate a single unified style. Rather, Jones argued for an eclecticism derived not from the copying of past styles, but through the establishment of a plurality of new designs based on rational principles.

22. Lambrusse, "Grammars of Ornament," 325–26.

This generative potential of grammars of ornament made them crucial to the curriculum of newly opened decorative arts schools within the Netherlands, which sought to manufacture a new, national language of ornamentation.

In the Netherlands, this discourse on ornamental decoration developed around *vlak ornament* (flat ornament).[23] As the name suggests, this aesthetic emphasized the two-dimensionality of a design or image. It gained widespread popularity as a result of a practical need for inexpensive, painted ornamentation—particularly in the wake of a decline in state funds made available for public projects at the end of the nineteenth century.[24] Those who theorized *vlak ornament* drew directly upon the tradition of conventionalization and anti-illusionism set forth by Jones. The earliest didactic manuals that advocated for *vlak ornament* were written out of necessity by instructors at recently opened design schools, as they sought to establish guiding principles for their newly restructured curricula. Many of the earliest examples of these texts, such as *The Plant in its Ornamental Treatment, With an Introduction about Symbolic Presentation* (1888) by Th. M. M. van Grieken (1842–1914), provided students with visual examples of how to compress botanical studies into flattened ornamental patterning (fig. 5.6).[25] Shortly thereafter, Herman J. de Vries published his important text *Geometrical Flat Ornament:*

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23. The term was a literal translation of the German *Flachornament*. It appeared frequently in Dutch theories of ornament beginning around 1880, and had numerous linguistic variations, including: *vlakversiering*, *vlakfiguren*, *vlakdecoratie*, *vlakbeschildering*, *vlakte-ornamenten*, *vlak-verdeeling*, and *vlakke versieringskunst*. Mienke Simon Thomas has compiled the most comprehensive study of theories of ornament in the Netherlands during the close of the nineteenth and opening years of the twentieth centuries. See Mienke Simon Thomas, *De leer van het ornament: Versieren volgens voorschrift, 1850–1930* [The theory of ornament: Decoration according to instruction, 1850–1930] (Amsterdam: De Bataafsche Leeuw, 1996).

24. Simon Thomas, *De leer van het ornament,* 62.

25. Th. M. M. van Grieken, *De Plant in hare Ornamentale Behandeling met eene Inleiding over de Zinnebeeldige Voorstelling* (Groningen: J. H. de Weijer, 1888).

More than 100 Motifs from Different Styles in 1891.[26] His book provided Dutch design students with instruction on how to create ornament through mathematics. He illustrated methods with which ornament could be made through the use of a compass and triangles of varying degrees.[27] By the turn of the century, these pedagogical texts came to a shared theoretical approach which argued for the use of geometry as an underlying guiding structure for students to produce new designs and patterns composed of flattened motifs. Numerous examples included *Triangles in the Design of Ornament for Personal Study and Schools* by J. H. de Groot and Jocoba M. de Groot (1896), *The Design of Ornament on System-Based and Natural Forms* by W. H. Bogtman (1905), *The Design of Flat Ornament* by Jan D. Ros (1905), and *The Design of Flat Decoration* by J. Godefroy (1912), to name but several of many (figs. 5.7a, b).[28]

The designers of Nieuwe Kunst—the Dutch equivalent to Art Nouveau—were the first generation of designers to be educated under and to draw upon many of the ideas set forth by the discourse on *vlak ornament*. They used the mathematical and scientific models advocated by these theoretical texts to sublate signifiers of the local—often through indigenous flora and fauna—into a universalizing visual language. Theodoor Willem Nieuwenhuis (1866–1951), for example, created vibrant wallpapers of Northern

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26. Herman J. de Vries. *Meetkunstig vlakornament: Ruim 100 motieven uit verschillende stijlen* (The Hague: Van Cleef, 1891).

27. De Vries concluded his introductory remarks with a reading list for students from which he devised his understanding of mathematically based ornament. Along with Owen Jones's *Grammar of Ornament* and Jacobthal's *Grammatik der Ornamente,* he also lists Anton Andel's *Das geometrische Ornament* and Karel Bötticher's *Der Tektonik der Hellenen* (1844–52) as sources. For further discussion, see Simon Thomas, *De leer van het ornament,* 289.

28. J. H. de Groot and Jacoba M. de Groot*, Driehoeken bij ontwerpen van ornament voor zelfstudie en voor scholen* (Amsterdam: Johannes G. Stemler, 1896); W. H. Bogtman, *Het ontwerpen van ornamenten op systeem en naar natuurvormen* (Haarlem: H. Kleinmann, 1905);

European species of plants (fig. 5.8). For a study in the Amsterdam residence of Ferdinand Kranenburg (1899–1901; fig. 5.9), Nieuwenhuis applied these geometrically derived motifs to built-in pieces within the room—such as the mantels and doors—creating a totalizing environment that made ubiquitous reference to its regional setting. Markers of a national style were extended beyond the borders of the Netherlands, as many artists also drew upon signifiers of the country's colonial holdings, specifically the island of Java in the Dutch East Indies (now Indonesia). Artists such as Chris Lebeau (1878–1945), Johan Thorn Prikker (1868–1932), Gerrit Willem Dijsselhof (1866–1924), and C. A. Lion Cachet (1864–1945), appropriated orientalizing motifs and batik—a process by which a design is applied to a fabric in wax before dyeing it, leaving the design as a negative imprint on the dyed fabric. Dijsselhof, with Wilhelmina Keuchenius (1865–1960), created several wall panels in batik, depicting exotic animals such as flamingos and peacocks, for the sitting room of the Amsterdam dermatologist Willem van Hoorn (1895–1900; fig. 5.10).[29]

Although not a work of interior design, a cover designed by Lion Cachet may best illustrate the process by which Nieuwe Kunst artists sought to reconstitute modern Dutch design (fig. 5.11). Executed in batik, the artist created a complex interweaving matrix of geometrically abstracted "claw" fern patterns in black and red. The design produces a pulsating optical effect, as the eye attempts to discern figure from background. It reflected perfectly what a contemporaneous reviewer in the British journal *The Studio* characterized as the definitive traits of modern Dutch design: "With very few exceptions,

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Jan D. Ros, *Het ontwerpen van vlakkeornament* (Rotterdam: W. L. and J. Brusse, 1905); and J. Godefroy, *Het ontwerpen van vlakke versiering* (Amsterdam: Ahrend, 1912).

a pronounced tendency will everywhere be found for geometric forms, combined with certain decorative elements culled from the barbaric art of the savage races of the remote East."[30] Lion Cachet's cover, however, was for the catalog of an exhibition of Rembrandt's work held in honor of the inauguration of Queen Wilhelmina in 1901.[31] The exhibition meant to tie Rembrandt, who by the turn of the nineteenth century stood metonymically for the glory of the Dutch "Golden Age," with a prosperous new era under the stewardship of Wilhelmina. Yet Lion Cachet's design provides little reference to the content of the book, save for the Rembrandt van Rijn insignia. His refusal to work in a style emblematic of the seventeenth century encapsulated the desire of the artists of Nieuwe Kunst, and eventually the Amsterdam School after the war, to construct a new, particularly Dutch aesthetic capable of distinguishing itself in an increasingly global cultural order based on transnational trade and commerce.

A Nieuwe Pedagogy

De Stijl artists were well aware of the pedagogical emphasis on flatness in ornamental theory then in vogue in the Netherlands, even following the war. Through several important didactic essays published in the pages of *De Stijl*, Huszar and Van Doesburg sought to directly challenge the established academic order, which, they maintained, was misleading a generation of design students. Their most polemical rebuff of modern Dutch design pedagogy's aesthetic and philosophical foundations came in Van Doesburg's

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29. See Jan de Bruijn, "Verlangen naar het oosten" [Dreaming of the East], in *Art Nouveau in Nederland*, ed. Jan de Bruijn (The Hague, Geementemuseum, 2018), 109–13.

30. Quoted in Mienke Simon Thomas, *Dutch Design: A History* (London: Reaktion, 2008), 38.

31. Elinoor Bergvelt, "The Decorative Arts in Amsterdam," in *Designing Modernity: The Arts of Reform and Persuasion: 1885–1945,* ed. Wendy Kaplan (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1995), 79–81.

serialized essay "Modern Trends in the Teaching of Art," published in *De Stijl* in 1919.[32] Van Doesburg highlighted four recently appointed academics as the targets of his various criticisms: Henri Cornelis Verkruijsen (1886–1955), director of the School of Architecture, Decorative Arts, and Crafts in Haarlem; Jannes Gerhardus Wattjes (1879–1944), professor of architecture at the Delft Technical University; Dr. Elisabeth Neurdenburg (1882–1957), reader in the history of modern art at the National University, Groningen; and Richard Nicolaüs Roland Holst (1868–1938), professor at the National Academy of Fine Arts (Rijksakademie van Beeldende Kunsten). In the introduction to his essay, Van Doesburg explained the crux of his animus towards these figures. He believed that underpinning their educational programs was a pernicious attempt to veil outdated aesthetic and ideological tendencies beneath the surface of the seemingly contemporary, abstracted aesthetics of *vlak ornament*. He concluded, "This behavior becomes irresponsible when it must serve to educate and advance the younger generation in the new. This can only lead to complete confusion in the younger generation and lay the groundwork for a new . . . dilettantism."[33]

Of the four academics addressed, Van Doesburg reserved his most focused ire for Roland Holst and Verkruijsen. The two had been locked in ongoing polemics with De Stijl members for several years. By the time of Van Doesburg's essay, these debates had

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32. Theo van Doesburg, "Moderne wendingen in het kunstonderwijs," *De Stijl* 2, no. 3 (January 1919): 33–35; no. 4 (February 1919): 44–48; no. 5 (March 1919): 57–58; no. 6 (April 1919): 66–68; no. 8 (June 1919): 91–94; no. 9 (July 1919): 102–4; no. 11 (September 1919): 127–32; and no. 12 (October 1919): 137–39.

33. "Onverantwoordelijk wordt deze gedragslijn, wanneer zij dienen moet om het jongere geslacht in het nieuwe op te voeden en voor te gaan. Dit kan er slechts toe leiden bij het jongere geslacht volslagen begripsverwarring te stichten en den grond te leggen voor een nieuwe . . . dilettantisme." Van Doesburg, "Moderne wendingen," 34. De Stijl artists used "dilletantism" as a term equivalent to "decadence." See my discussion on the nature of decadence in chapter 1.

played out over a number of heated articles and public lectures on the nature of ornamentation in the modern built environment. Huszar, for example, had targeted Roland Holst directly in the fourth installment of his own serialized essay "Aesthetic Considerations," published in the May 1918 issue of *De Stijl*.[34] Here, Huszar sought to expose the perceived inadequacies of modern *vlak ornament*. As he had done in previous installments, he presented two reproductions: a large-scale painting by Bart van der Leck, *Work at the Docks* (1916; fig. 5.12); and a section of a wall mural completed by Roland Holst in 1907 for the Diamond Cutters' Union building in Amsterdam (fig. 5.13).[35] The two images illustrated his discussion of what constituted the truly modern form of ornamental painting. The choice of a mural by Roland Holst was strategic. He had been a champion of *vlak ornament*, famously voicing his support for Antoon Derkinderen's (1859–1925) mural completed for the Town Hall of 's-Hertogenbosch (fig. 5.14) in an 1892 article published in *De Nieuwe Gids*.[36] In the opening years of the twentieth century, Roland Holst's work became increasingly two-dimensional and stylized, as he

34. Vilmos Huszar, "Aesthetische Beschouwingen. IV," *De Stijl* 1, no. 7 (May 1918): 79–84.

35. The building was designed and built by Hendrik Petrus Berlage. See the discussion of Roland Holst's project in Lieske Tibbe, "Gemeenschapskunst op Afstand" [Community art at a distance], in *Henriette & Richard Roland Holst: Het Boek van de Buissche Heide*, ed. Ron Dirven (Zundert, Netherlands: Vincent van Gogh Huis, 2012): 145–76.

36. Richard Roland Holst, "De beteekenis van Derkinderens nieuwe muurschildering in onze schilderkunst" [The meaning of Derkinderen's new wall painting in our painting], *De Nieuwe Gids* 7, no. 1 (1892): 321. In his article, Roland Holst pronounced, "Because even more important than the mural painting itself . . . is the fact that Derkinderen gave, for the first time in Holland in our era, a painting that is not the result of the immediate influence of reality on the artist, but where reality was only taken to represent the abstract concept that lies behind the real" [Want belangrijker nog dan de muurschildering zelf . . . is het feit dat Derkinderen voor het eerst in Holland in onzen tijd, een stuk schilderkunst heeft gegeven, dat niet is voortgekomenuit den dadelijken invloed van de realiteit op den artiest, maar waar alleen de realiteit is genomen, om het abstrakte begrip dat achter die werkelijkheid is, te verbeelden"]. In his reference to abstraction, Roland Holst meant to convey the mystical concepts that Derkinderen was able to express in these works through his channeling of early Renaissance "primitive" painters. For further

drew upon Byzantine and Romanesque traditions and those of Secessionist and Art Nouveau contemporaries to establish his own aesthetic within Nieuwe Kunst. He created predominantly flattened compositions in which figures are defined by thick contours and unmodulated color, exemplified by the well-known mural *Industry* (1902; fig. 5.15) for Berlage's Stock Exchange in Amsterdam.

In spite of its abandonment of mimetic naturalism in favor of flattened, conventionalized motifs and abstracted figures, Huszar asserted that Roland Holst's Diamond Cutters' Union mural, and *vlak ornament* in general, remained a fallacy. On the one hand, *vlak ornament*'s claim to be a viable expression of the modern era was undercut by its blurring of past aesthetic traditions, which, he argued, represented nothing other than a cultural *nabloei*—literally "after-bloom," the term was a synonym for decadence or the decline of such a practice.[37] On the other, and more damning in Huszar's eyes, was the superficiality inherent in the collapse of ornament two-dimensionally onto the surface without a sufficient set of uniform, guiding principles.[38] He wrote, "We must find the error in our social situation, that everywhere we look, appearance (stimulations) dominate, while the immediate truth arising from inner

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discussion see Carel Blotkamp, "Art Criticism in De Nieuwe Gids," *Simiolus: Netherlands Quarterly for the History of Art* 5, no. 1/2 (1971): 133.

37. Huszar wished to differentiate the idea of influence from that of *nabloei*. He wrote, "One must distinguish here between *nabloei*, or death, and influence. Influence undergoes every manifestation of differing expressions, without influence there is no evolution. *Nabloei*, on the other hand, means to adopt an earlier view and therein make, without essential difference, further works. Working through this *nabloei* means death" [Men moet hier onderscheid maken tusschen nabloei, afsterven en invloed. Invloed ondergaat elke uiting van andere uitingen, zonder invloed evolueert niets. Nabloei daarentegen beteekent zich een vroegere opvatting eigen maken en daarin zonder essentieel verschil verder werken. Op dezen nabloei doorwerken beteekent aftreven]. Huszar, "Aesthetische Beschouwingen. IV.," 81.

38. Such a critique must of course be taken with a grain of salt. Although they were dictated by mathematics, Huszar found the remnants of figuration and echoes of Byzantine aesthetics in Roland Holst's work to fall short of the guiding principles advocated by De Stijl.

conviction is being mocked."[39] Roland Holst's mural, according to Huszar, although abstracted, marshaled its abstraction toward the creation of mere optical effects, intended to elicit physical rather than metaphysical stimulation.

Huszar explained this through a binary opposition of abstraction versus stylization. He wrote:

> This spiritual poverty leads to still more inconsistencies, namely, in a decoration, partially plastic, partially flat, working plastically to place figures (see [Holst's wall mural]). Though here light and shadow are eliminated upon the figures, the line yet has plastic effect due to a lack of tightening whereby it contains a natural element, thus not being abstracted. Style and abstraction . . . are entirely different things. When styling, the goal is set to flatten natural representation without transformation, which is decorative instead of plastic.[40]

Although flattened, Roland Holst's mural exists merely as a stylization of traditional practices of wall painting: from his use of allegorical motifs to his employment of various ornamental patterns that draw directly from historical examples. Only a geometric and abstract mode of ornamental painting that privileged formal structure over content—as exemplified, according to Huszar, by Van der Leck's work—could move beyond these limitations. Huszar argued, "For us moderns, the centuries of free painting that lie behind us must mean the development period for a soon-to-be breakthrough of architectural

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39. "Wij moeten hier de fout zoeken in onze maatschappelijke toestanden, overall zien wij, dat de schijnuitingen (prikkels) overheerschen, terwijl het onmiddelijk-ware, onstaan uit innerlijke overtuiging bespot wordt." Huszar, "Aesthetische Beschouwingen. IV," 80.

40. "Deze geestelijke armoede voert tot nog meer ongerijmdheden, n.l. in een versiering, gedeeltelijk plastisch, gedeeltelijk vlak, plastisch werkende figuren te plaatsen (zie afb. B). Alis hier licht en schaduw bij de figuren weggewerkt, zoo hebben de lijnen toch plastische werking door gemis aan verstrakking, waardoor, ze een naturalistisch element in zich houden, dus niet geabstraheerd zijn. Styleeren en abstraheeren . . . zijn geheel verschillende dingen. Bij styleeren, wordt het doel gesteld, de natuurlijke voorstelling zonder ombeelding te vervlakken." Huszar, "Aesthetische Beshouwingen. IV," 82.

painting. This line of development does not go through Puvis de Chavannes, etc., but principally via impressionism to pointillism and futurism, through cubism, to *nieuwe beelding*."[41] Education was essential to achieving this goal. In the conclusion of his essay, Huszar called for new leadership in the "official organs of the fine arts," to guide a young generation which held the greatest potential for embracing a monumental, ornamental painting built on the principles of *nieuwe beelding*.

Thus Roland Holst's acceptance of the directorship of the National Academy of Fine Arts in 1918 was viewed as a challenge to De Stijl's new ideas of monumental painting. The threat was compounded by the open hostility toward De Stijl that Roland Holst expressed in his inaugural address as director. A dedicated socialist, he derided the loss of artistic craft to the machine precision of mass production in the growth of Dutch industrial manufacturing.[42] Arguing along Ruskinian lines, he viewed monumental wall painting as vital in the preservation of artistic labor and a critical bulwark to the standardization of the built environment. Making the subject central to his address, he

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41. "Voor ons modernen moeten de eeuwen van vrij schilderen, die achter ons liggen, de groei-periode beteeenen voor de weldra doorbrekende architecturale schilderkunst. Deze ontwikkelingslijn gaat niet via Puvis de Chavannes, enz., maar voornamelijk via het Impressionisme, naar het pointillisme en futurisme over het kubisme, naar de nieuwe beelding." Huszar, "Aesthetische Beshouwingen. IV," 82. Huszar's reference to Puvis de Chanvannes was likely also a veiled critique of Just Havelaar (1880–1930), a Dutch painter who argued that the French painter marked the coming of a new age. See Doig, *Theo van Doesburg,* 17 (see chap. 1, n. 14).

42. Roland Holst's inaugural address was reprinted as "Ethische factoren in de monumentale schilderkunst" [Ethical factors in monumental painting], in *Over Kunst en Kunstenaars* [On art and artists] (Amsterdam: J. M. Meulenhoff, 1923), 143–73. White suggests that the depth of this hostility carried over into Van Doesburg's work. In 1919, he was commissioned by Hagemeijer and Company, a Dutch exporter, to design packaging for Gouda cheese. White argues that Van Doesburg's choice to include a geometrically stylized archer on the packaging was in direct reference to, and a reimagination of, Roland Holst's iconic design for a program of events celebrating the eight-hour workday, produced by the General Dutch Diamond Cutters' Union (Algemeene Neerlandsche Diamantwerkers Bond). For additional discussion of these works,

asserted the importance of the laws of geometry in the execution of mural painting, as they elevated the content of the work to a more spiritual level. He maintained, however, that the use of pure geometry in and of itself was, as Allan Doig summarized, "a purely intellectual and narrow-minded exercise, a consequence of not being able to see that number and measure are to be found throughout the natural world."[43] Roland Holst viewed the geometric abstraction of movements such as De Stijl—which he pejoratively referred to indirectly as "a-formists"—as a threat to the subjectivity of the individual artist.[44] This aesthetic, and the artists who promoted it, he maintained, resulted from "the mechanization and industrialization of the spirit." He wrote, "The a-formists want to conquer the architectonic plane, but they do not see that they have already become its slaves. Those who want to conquer are already spiritually overwhelmed and mechanized, that is precisely their tragic mistake."[45] In overtly nationalist terms, he viewed such an ornamental aesthetic as foreign to Dutch sensibility, pointing outside the nation's borders to Germany—devoid of a cultural past and motivated by "dreamless power fanatics" and industrialists—as the origin of the geometric abstraction being advocated in the pages of *De Stijl*.

Van Doesburg, in turn, responded directly to Roland Holst's inaugural address in "Modern Trends in the Teaching of Art." He criticized the latter's "anti-German

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Roland Holst's essay, and its implications, see White, *De Stijl and Dutch Modernism*, 85–88 (see chap. 1, n. 25).

43. Doig, *Theo van Doesburg,* 56.

44. He equates monumental painting with *vlak versiering*, or flat decoration, a phrase that was used frequently in the place of *vlakornament* (see chap. 4, n. 23). Simon Thomas, *De leer van het ornament*, 38.

45. "De a-formisten willen het architectonische vlak veroveren, maar zij zien niet dat zij reeds de slaven van het architectonische vlak zijn geworden. Zij die veroveren willen, zijn reeds geestelijk

propaganda," defending the significance of the philosophical foundations of Kant, Hegel, Schopenhauer, and Nietzsche in the formation of a modern, monumental painting.[46] Mirroring the critical points of Huszar's earlier article, he disparaged Roland Holst's murals for the Diamond Cutters' Union as "hanging in tatters." For Van Doesburg, the mural failed to speak to the demands of the modern era, and thus quickly took on an antiquated appearance. He argued that this exposed the newly appointed director's deceptive version of *vlak ornament*, which, he claimed, offered a false objectivity through the implementation of geometry. Van Doesburg believed Roland Holst's emphasis on flattened, geometric studies of natural forms failed to unify the entire composition into a balanced, relational whole. He argued, "In the *material vision* of natural form . . . one can indeed believe to find in the number of veins in a leaf, in the number of leaves on a branch, and in their mutual proportion "number" and "measure," but this is all material, visual and has nothing to do with the number and measure as relational concepts in the visual arts."[47] For Van Doesburg, this confusion within academic circles between the mere application of geometry in ornamental painting and its universalizing capacity to unify the built environment through an entirely abstract visual system was a great threat to the advancement of De Stijl's totalizing vision.

Van Doesburg sought to clarify this muddling of conceptual terms regarding monumental painting in his response to Verkruijsen. The two had been locked in an

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geheel overweldigd en gemechaniseerd, dat is juist hun tragisch misverstaan." Roland Holst, *Ethische factoren*, 169.

46. Van Doesburg, "Moderne wendingen," 131.

47. "In het *materieele zien* der natuurvormen . . . kan men inderdaad in et aantal bladeren aan een tak en in hunne onderlinge proportie 'getal' en 'maat' meenen te terugvinden, doch dit alles is materieel, visueel en heeft met getal en maat als verhoudingsbegrippen in de beeldende kunst niets te maken." Van Doesburg, "Moderne wendingen," 130.

ongoing feud since 1916, instigated by a lecture that Van Doesburg gave to the group Architectura et Amicitia on December 20 of that year. In defense of abstraction as a means of forming a new style, he relied heavily upon the writings of Wilhelm Worringer.[48] Verkruijsen responded critically to the obtuse and vague language of Van Doesburg's discussion, at first published in the pages of *Architectura,* and again later in *Die Nieuwe Amsterdammer*.[49] It was in response to the latter essay, in conjunction with the greater prominence that Verkruijsen received with his promotion to director, that Van Doesburg felt a sense of urgency to correct the newly promoted academic's design pedagogy and, in the process, contemporary theories on ornamentation more broadly.

Organized into seven abbreviated commentaries in response to specific quoted statements from Verkruijsen, and directed towards modern design students, Van Doesburg's article reinforced his objection to the director's pedagogy. He argued that Verkruijsen's advocacy of flattened motifs in ornamental painting promoted an "incorrect concept of 'flat.'"[50] Verkruijsen's instruction, he said, while accepting the flattening and abstracting of natural motifs, remained too dependent on "the personal and the natural,

48. In a hotly worded letter to the editor of *Architectura*, following a lively debate sparked by his lecture, Van Doesburg quoted directly from Worringer: "The primal artistic impulse has nothing to do with the rendering of nature. It seeks after pure abstraction as the only possibility of repose within the confusion and obscurity of the world-picture, and creates out of itself, with instinctive necessity, geometric abstraction." Theo van Doesburg, "Repliek aan den heer H. C. Verkruijsen en zijns gelijken" [Response: A reply to Mr. H. C. Verkruijsen and his peers], in *Architectura* 25, no. 5 (February 1917): 32. Translated in Doig, *Theo van Doesburg,*18.

49. Allan Doig has traced the course of this debate, which spread into a series of public responses published as articles: First by H. C. Verkruijsen, "Ingezonden" [Response], *Architectura* 25, no. 3 (January 20, 1917): 17–18; responded to by Van Doesburg in "Ingezonden: Repliek aan den Heer H. C. Verkruijsen en Zijns Gelijken," *Architectura* 25, no. 5 (February 3, 1917), 32–33; to which Verkruijsen wrote the following year "De Nieuwe Schilderkunst" [The New Painting], *Wendingen* 1, no. 2 (February 20, 1918): 8–11.

50. Van Doesburg, "Moderne wendingen," 47.

the individual and the particular," and thus failed to establish a universal system from which a new monumental painting could emerge. Drawing heavily from Hegel, he stated:

> Through reason (the mind) the individual (feeling) is elevated towards the concept. This is achieved in philosophy along the path of true (objective) *insight*, while in the visual arts through true (objective) beauty. In plastic work it is about the balanced relationship between two opposing factors: the individual, particular (nature) and the general (spirit).[51]

Thus Van Doesburg perceived Verkruijsen's dissemination of *vlak ornament*, like Roland Holst's, as advocating for mere stylization: a continuance of past methods of decoration that failed to speak to the true nature of the modern era. Such stylizing was leading modern design students astray, he said, and "[impairing] the foundation for a future plastic applied art."[52]

Rather, Van Doesburg argued, modern students of design must be pushed through a dialectical process in order to transcend the restraints of figuration in the practice of ornamental design. The artist described this process with a number of infrequently used derivations from the Dutch word *beeld* (image): beginning with *afbeelden* (depiction), then *doorbeelden* (decomposition), and finally, *ombeelden* (transformation).[53] In explicitly Nietzschean terms, he stated that there must be a "transvaluation" of past

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51. "Door de redelijkheid (het verstand) wordt de afzonderlijkheid (gevoel) opgevoerd tot de begrip. In de wijsbegeerte langs den weg van het ware (objectieve) *inzicht*, in de beeldende kunst door het ware (objectieve) schoone. Het gaat in den beeldenden arbeid om de evenwichtige verhouding tusschen de twee tegendeeling factoren: het afzonderlijke, bijzondere (natuur) en het algemene (geest)." Van Doesburg, "Moderne wendingen," 47.

52. "Hierdoor, wordt de grondslag voor een toekomstige beeldende nijverheidskunst verzwakt." Van Doesburg, "Moderne wendingen," 58.

53. Van Doesburg, "Moderne wendingen," 47.

aesthetics in order for a new means of ornamentation to arise, based on an abstract visual language grounded in rational principles:

> With *ombeelden*, a natural value is intended to be converted into an artistic value in the new art. (The Germans have the right word for this, "transvaluation.") Style, on the contrary, is in essence no different than pronouncing a natural value. *Ombeelden* is necessary—and herein in large part lies the modern *plastic mystique*—coupled with the *destruction* of the natural-organic in order to come to a more spiritual *plastic-construction*. The artist does not stop at *ombeelden*, but passes then completely through the whole manner of art toward a new construction, that is to say, he creates according to a balanced relationship with nothing other than the plastic means. Style, on the contrary, does not come to destruction, thus it has nothing to do with *ombeelden*. . . ."[54]

According to Van Doesburg, the flattened and stylized motifs characteristic of *vlak ornament* remained tethered to a repetition of the past, too burdened by the narrow, national set of social and cultural signifiers it maintained. As discussed in chapter 2, the artist shared Nietzsche's pan-European, utopian vision of a modern, unified culture. It was thus essential for Van Doesburg to build on the foundational position of mathematics in Dutch ornament by transcending its figural and national limitations—at this early moment, a path he viewed as having been initiated by cubism and futurism. "Only by imparting the essential meaning of futurism and cubism and the consistent development of these transitional stages to a new unity of style," he wrote, "will the art student be able

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54. "Met ombeelden wordt in de nieuwe kunst bedoeld een natuurwaarde in een kunstwaarde omzetten. (De Duitsers hebben hiervoor het juiste woord "umwerten" [sic]). Styleeren daarentegen is in ween niet anders dan een natuurwaard prononceeren. Ombeelden gaat noodwendig,—en hierin schuilt voor een groot deel de modern *beeldingsmystiek*sgepaard met *destructie* van het natuurlijk-organische om tot een meer spiritueele *beeldingsconstructie* te komen. De Kunstenaar blijft niet bij ombeelden, maar gaat dan geheel op de wijze der kunst tot een nieuwe constructive over d.w.z. hij beeldt volgens evenwichtige verhouding met niets dan

to contribute to the realization of the latter."[55] For Van Doesburg, a nonobjective mode of design was the only one suitable to bring the modern, international "good European" to reality.[56]

A Pattern for Style

Although in their polemical writings Huszar and Van Doesburg implored students of art and design to transcend the limits of representation, both De Stijl members drew from a repertoire of traditional Dutch subject matter for their initial decorative commissions. Furthermore, they employed a process of geometric simplification and patterning similar to that of *vlak ornament*, albeit one inflected through the lens of cubist and futurist aesthetics.[57] An early example of such experimentation is a group of sketches Van

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zijn beeldingsmiddel. Styleeren daarentegen komt aan destructie niet toe, dus heft noch met ombeelden . . . te maken." Van Doesburg, "Moderne wendingen," 47–48.

55. "Slechts door het bijbrengen van de wezenlijke beteeknis van futurism en kubisme en de consequentie ontwikkeling dezer overgangsstadia naar een nieuwe stijl-eenheid zal de kunststudent naar zijn krachten kunnen bijdragen tot de verwezenlijking van deze laatste." Van Doesburg, "Moderne wendingen," 58.

56. Van Doesburg would reinforce his Nietschean worldview several years later in his pseudofuturist text *Caminoscopie*, written under the pseudonym Aldo Camini. He pretended to have translated the text from the original Italian essay by Camini: "Camini expresses his admiration for the doctrine of destruction, that is, to have the courage to renew life by destruction in order to build our new selves. A similar train of thought occurs in 'Zarathustra.'" Trans. in Hannah L. Hendrick, *Theo van Doesburg: Propogandist and Practitioner of the Avant-Garde, 1909–1923* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1980), 117.

57. In Van Doesburg's 1916 book, *The New Movement in Painting* [De nieuwe beweging in de schilderkunst], he defines the term "cubism" not in explicit reference to the French movement. Rather, he applies a much broader significance to his understanding of the term, using it to describe a work that utilized mathematics in order to articulate space. He wrote: "The Cubist (a name that is in fact meaningless and was applied in a derisory manner) extracts the mathematical from the natural form and in so doing retains the pure artistic form. This artistic form comes from within; this is the spiritual form; the spiritual form is the plastic; and the plastic, the pure. The cubist is fully conscious of the plastic value which an object possesses, but for him the object is the logical clarification of Space and therefore has a deeper, more philosophical meaning for him than for the Impressionists. . . . The point is therefore not to imitate or copy a section of actual Space, as it was with the painters who used linear and atmospheric perspective, the point is to express the concept 'Space'. To this end, the cubist concerns himself with mathematical forms."

Doesburg made for an unrealized stained-glass window during the opening months of 1917. The intended subject of the composition was agricultural labor.[58] A sketch from this group, likely the earliest of those extant, reveals a great deal about Van Doesburg's underlying approach to his initial forays into decorative design (fig. 5.16). In the center of the uneven sheet are two abstracted figures raking. Both are hunched over, one obscured behind the other. Drawing on his recent experiments in abstraction from 1916, Van Doesburg constructed the bodies and heads of the raking figures with interlocking geometric forms, while articulating their limbs through sharp oblique lines. To the right of this motif is a triangular diagram of intersecting lines, with which Van Doesburg appears to have worked out the linear structure he sought to accomplish with the motif. Just below the two figures, on the lower edge of the sheet, is a small pattern of interconnected semicircles punctuated by alternating vertical lines. Directly next to the pattern, Van Doesburg wrote "the beat," alluding to the overall effect he desired to create with a pattern based on the raking motif.[59] On a separate sheet (fig. 5.17), the artist experimented further with different configurations of this design. His goal with this sketch was to find a composition that would connect the figures with a second identical pair, to create a repeating pattern.

The complexity of the overlapping raking motif, however, failed to lend itself adequately to creating an interlocking pattern. In a subsequent drawing (fig. 5.18), Van Doesburg recognized this and simplified the motif by eliminating the second figure. In

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Van Doesburg, *De nieuwe beweging*, 24–26. Quoted and translated in Doig, *Theo van Doesburg*, 83–84.

58. On one of the drawings he wrote "rakers," while on another "digger," making clear the theme.

59. While *de maat* is usually translated "size," it also has musical connotations, as the measure or beat of a rhythm.

four sketches at the top of the sheet, he reduced the body to a simple rectangle tilted at a forty-five-degree angle, and represented the figure's head with a small circle. A sharp vertical line that represents the right leg passes through the center of the body, creating an organizing line around which the figure is structured. The stability of the bisecting vertical line is interrupted by the dynamic oblique line comprising the figure's right arm and the rake. Below this grouping of sketches, he overlapped nine raking figures, creating a compressed undulating pattern. This method of patterning proved to be fruitful. Van Doesburg used a similar process in a contemporaneous second group of sketches for another unrealized project. Now using the motif of a figure digging (fig. 5.19), he arranged two rows of four figures set one on top of the other. As with the raking motif, a pattern is developed by interlocking the various figures with diagonal lines linking the shovel of the top figure and the shoulders of the one below it. He worked with this model further in two subsequent drawings (figs. 5.20, 5.21), in which he created highly abstracted patterns that elude nearly all semblance of representation.

Slightly later, in 1917, Van Doesburg explored how he could move beyond the repetitive nature of ornamental patterning to create a structure better suited to expressing the syncopated rhythm of modern life. This investigation grew out of the artist's interest in the effects of dissonance from his reading of Wassily Kandinsky and his knowledge of Arnold Schönberg's (1874–1951) musical theories. Jan Wils commissioned him to design a group of stained-glass windows and a decorative frieze for a school and its adjoining teachers' residence in the small town of Sint Anthoniepolder, located to the south of Rotterdam.[60] Evidence of Van Doesburg's frieze remains only in the form of

60. Van Straaten, *Theo van Doesburg*, 32–35 (see chap. 3, n. 61).

documentary photographs, as the buildings have since been destroyed (fig. 5.22).[61] The frieze comprised a single abstracted motif of rectangular forms in black, green, red, and yellow. To establish a sense of rhythm, Van Doesburg mirrored and flipped this motif, and then alternated the motif and its inverted mirror image to create a structurally simple, yet visually dynamic pattern below the ceiling in the school. He also used the pattern as a chair railing in the teachers' residence (figs. 5.23a, 5.23b). The inclusion of the decorative frieze for the school and residence did not stray far from the precedent typical of nineteenth-century wall decoration. While the tradition employed the classical Greco-Roman elevation as its ordering principle, domesticating and simplifying it for interior walls, Van Doesburg, in turn, reduced this order further.[62] The commission afforded him one of his earliest opportunities to experiment with a modern inflection of this tradition through abstraction.

Van Doesburg's abstract design for his frieze relied heavily on a number of aesthetic ideas that *De Stijl* contributor Bart van der Leck had been exploring since the previous year.[63] Influenced by Egyptian and medieval European wall painting, Van der Leck experimented with flattened compositions of local Dutch subject matter, such as *The Soccer Players* (1913; fig. 5.24) and *Work at the Docks* (1916; fig. 5.12); the latter

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61. No preparatory drawings remain. There exist several black and white photographs taken around the time of the project's completion, which are housed in the archives of Jan Wils in Het Nieuwe Instituut. To my knowledge a single, color documentary photograph of the faded frieze was taken by the art historian Evert van Straaten in 1988, shortly before the building was razed. Van Straaten argues that the frieze was of Van Doesburg's design, based on its similarity to his design for the De Lange home shortly afterward. See Van Straaten, *Theo van Doesburg*, 33–34.

62. Stefan Muthesius has traced this thoroughly. The features of skirting, dado, picture rail, frieze, and cornices all drew from the standard model set by ancient Greco-Roman precedents. See Muthesius, *Poetic Home,* 143–45 (see chap. 3, n. 37).

was highlighted as a foil to Roland Holst in Huszar's critical essay "Aesthetic Considerations."[64] He conceived these works entirely in relationship to the wall. To establish a greater homology between the surface of his easel paintings and that of the wall, Van der Leck began executing many of his works in casein on Eternit (an asbestos-based, fiber-cement board) or in thick impasto, to mask the weave of the canvas and mimic the density of the desired material support.[65] In furtherance of his goal to unify decorative painting with the modern, unpapered architectural surface, he began to simplify his compositions into groupings of rectilinear forms that marked the basic contours or features of the image with which he started (figs. 5.25a–5.25c). Van der Leck's *Composition 1916, No. 4 (Mine Tryptic)* (1916; fig. 5.26) was the largest instantiation of this endeavor.[66] Van Doesburg's decorative frieze drew upon Van der Leck's method of visual deconstruction in general, and *Mine Triptych* in particular, as he produced two paintings around this time of simplified rectangular forms in primary colors and white set on a black background (fig. 5.27). The frieze's composition was most likely derived from a representational model, as was a similar decorative frieze designed by Van Doesburg a year later for another project by Wils—this time for the home of the Alkmaar-based notary Jan de Lange (fig. 5.28). This decorative frieze used the same mirroring and inversion technique as Van Doesburg's Sint Anthoniepolder design, and

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63. Van der Leck attempted to apprentice under Derkinderen, a leading figure in the establishment of *vlak ornament* and the Arts and Crafts revival in the Netherlands, as discussed above.

64. See n. 34 above.

65. Hillhorst, "Bart van der Leck," 159 (see chap. 1, n. 17).

66. As will be discussed in chapter 5, the work was derived from drawings Van der Leck had made of mines owned by Müller and Company in North Africa and Spain.

based on an inscription on a stencil for this motif, it is believed that the abstract composition was that of a cat.[67]

The Sint Antoniepolder frieze followed a pattern similar to that of five stained-glass windows Van Doesburg had designed for the adjoining teachers' residence (fig. 5.29a, 5.29b). Each window contained eight abstracted ice skaters, rendered in yellow, red, and blue pieces of rectangular glass. In their original state, Van Doesburg again implemented the practice of mirroring and rotation in each window.[68] He mirrored the outer skating motif over the diagonal wooden frame, rotating the figure 180 degrees to give the appearance that the pairs are skating away from one another. Van Doesburg's motif was likely adopted from a painting by Huszar completed in February 1917 (fig. 5.30). In *Composition II (Skaters)*, Huszar organized sixteen abstracted skating figures into five columns. All of the skaters are in one of three positions: either with head forward and back leg up, head up and front leg lifted, or head back and back leg up. The figures are not arranged arbitrarily. In fact, Huszar organized his three motifs axially to create symmetrical patterns throughout the composition. Made on an Eternit fiber-cement board—similar to what Van der Leck was experimenting with at the time—the painting may have been a study for an unrealized project in tile for an unknown interior. In a letter

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67. Van Straaten noted that based on inscriptions on the several extant stencils for the design, it was intended for the dining room of the home. However, he believes that the border was ultimately excluded from Van Doesburg's interior color schemes. Van Straaten, *Theo van Doesburg*, 41.

68. According to Ankie de Jongh-Vermeuen, the present arrangement of the windows is not original. At some time before the restoration in 1988, the windows were taken apart and reassembled incorrectly. See Ankie de Jongh-Vermeuen, "Theo van Doesburg: Een avant-gardist in Leiden, 1916–1921," in *Dageraad van de modern kunst: Leiden en omgeving* [Dawn of modern art: Leiden and its environs], ed. Doris Wintgens Hötte and Ankie de Jongh-Vermeulen (Leiden: Steelijk Museum De Lakenhal, 1999), 209–56.

from April that year, Huszar referred to the painting as a "*tegel-tableau*" (tile-tableau).[69] Huszar applied Van der Leck's abstract visual language in several additional designs in 1917: *Ornament in the Style of the Twentieth Century* and two decorative panels depicting the zodiac on the side of a clock (figs. 5.31, 5.32). As Sjarel Ex and Els Hoek have observed, these works demonstrated the seriousness with which Huszar and Van Doesburg took Van der Leck's method of abstraction as a solution for integrating their aesthetic into the modern built environment.[70]

In his work on the De Lange house, Van Doesburg advanced his exploration of complex pattern designs with a glass mosaic he devised for above the fireplace in the study (figs. 5.33a, 5.33b).[71] The artists again constructed the composition from a single motif. This foundational motif, visible in the upper left of the design, comprises hovering rectangular forms of primary and secondary colors. As Allan Doig has documented and diagrammed, Van Doesburg divided the composition into four rows of three motifs (fig. 5.34).[72] In the top row, for example, he inverted the motif in the center and then used a mirror of the motif in the upper right. He repeated this process of mirroring and rotation throughout the lower rows. The complex pattern masked the underlying structural symmetry of the mosaic. Nancy Troy has argued, "Van Doesburg's repeated use of mirror and inverse pattern imagery can . . . be explained by his express intention to avoid strictly symmetrical compositions, which he identified with traditional perspective and

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69. There is no surviving example of a tile work by Huszr that may have been related to this work. See Ex and Hoek, *Vilmos Huszar*, 3 (see chap. 3, n. 135).

70. Ex and Hoek, *Vilmos Huszar,* 38–40.

71. In a letter to Antony Kok, Van Doesburg wrote of his achievement in "das colorierte Haus": "The most impressive room is the study: bookcase *green, black,* and *white*, walls covered in green baize! All freed by white. Green stone fireplace with white tiled sides. In the middle a glass mosaic designed by myself." Quoted and translated in Van Straaten, *Theo van Doesburg,* 38.

the destruction of the integrity of the architectural surface."[73] Troy based her argument on the position regarding interior design that Van Doesburg maintained in *Three Lectures*: "[It is that] painting whose abstract nature makes it fit to form a rhythmical unity with architecture. The independent painting, the 'tableau de chevalet,' was not suited to this because, in its chiaroscuro and perspectival elements, it was contrary to the architectonic ideal."[74] While Van Doesburg wanted to avoid perspectival or atmospheric depth that would blur the lines between real and illusionistic space, his aversion to symmetry and repetition in his designs was also related to his broader understanding of the aesthetic conditions demanded by modern life.

In the essay "Symmetry and Culture," published in *De Stijl* in 1918, Jan Wils directly addressed what he perceived as the fundamentally asymmetrical nature of modern society.[75] He argued that both natural and cultural objects—from microbes to animals and from wheels to automobiles—have evolved over the course of history into increasingly more complex structures which broke away from symmetry and toward asymmetry.[76] He presented an evolutionary history of architecture, equating the structural complexity of Greco-Roman monuments to that of plant life, and later Gothic architecture to higher animals. As Michael White has observed, in this system Wils identified man as the least symmetrical and thus most advanced creature in the natural world. Accordingly, mankind requires an environment that is in itself asymmetrical. This

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72. Doig, *Theo Van Doesburg*, 71–72.

73. Troy, *De Stijl Environment*, 30.

74. Troy, *De Stijl Environment*, 30.

75. Jan Wils, "Symmetrie en Kultuur," *De Stijl* 1, no. 12 (October 1918): 137–40.

76. Wils assembled a taxonomical order within which he placed all natural and cultural objects into seven categories based upon their structural symmetry.

asymmetrical environment, Wils argued, had only just begun to come into being in the modern era, as evidenced by the asymmetrical structures found in modern machines.[77] "The modern architect no longer searches for 'classical' symmetry," Wils wrote, "but for balance, and thus asymmetry. . . . It is therefore understandable that the modern building will show a lot of resemblance to the modern machine, e.g. the rotary press or the steam plough."[78] Wils's understanding of modernity as fundamentally asymmetrical in form provided De Stijl aesthetics with a temporal and structural argument with which to demarcate its project as both historically separate from and structurally more advanced than that of the symmetry intrinsic to *vlak ornament* and its manifestation in pattern design. Van Doesburg's movement toward increasingly asymmetrical chromatic patterning reflected this refinement of these aesthetic theories.

Sparking a New Turn: De Vonk

Van Doesburg's experimentation with pattern rotation and inversion advanced in scale and scope with the monumental tile floors and façade panels he executed for a weekend house for working women. Oud designed the building, which was commissioned by the Leiden Volkhuis under the directorship of Emelie Knappert, an ardent member of the Netherlands Christian socialist movement.[79] Berlage, whom Knappert knew through their

77. Michael White provided compelling analysis of Wils's text in relation to architecture. See White, *De Stijl and Dutch Modernism,* 36.

78. "De modern architect zoekt niet meer naar het 'klassieke' symmetrische, maar naar het evenwichtige, dus het asymmetrische. . . . Het is daarom mede begrijpelijk, dat het modern bouwwerk veel overeenkomst gaat vertoonen met de modern machine, b.v. de rotatiepers of de stoomploeg." Wils, "Symmetrie en Kultuur," 140. Wils further argued that the symmetrical structure of modern city planning limited an architect's ability to fully realize his aim of asymmetrical architecture.

79. As one of the earliest examples of cooperation among De Stijl members, the project has garnered extensive attention in the literature. Jane Beckett was one of the first scholars to explore

shared involvement in the Dutch socialist movement, recommended Oud for the commission. The building was completed and dedicated on February 8, 1918—a date selected to commemorate Ruskin's birthday (fig. 5.35). In honor of Thomas Carlyle (1795–1881), the building was given the name De Vonk (The spark) to connote its goal of sparking learning and self-improvement.[80] Oud's plan for the building was organized symmetrically around a central monumental staircase which united the sleeping quarters on the second floor with the communal spaces on the first level (figs. 5.36a, 5.36b). This symmetry extended beyond the floor plan and into the façade, for which Oud employed pitched roofing and simple Dutch brickwork evocative of contemporaneous trends in school design.[81] The works Van Doesburg created for the façade and interior floor of the building operated within this symmetry, while simultaneously destabilizing it through the complex patterns he created in brick and tile.

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in depth the project's consequences for De Stijl theory. See Jane Beckett, "'De Vonk,' Noordwijk: An Example of Early De Stijl Co-Operation," *Art History* 5, no. 2 (June 1980): 202–17. Building on Beckett's analysis, Troy developed a binary model of De Stijl as a shifting relationship between painter and architect, in which the building served as an example of the dominance of the latter over the former in the early years of the group; see Troy, *De Stijl Environment*, 17–23. Doig conducted an important structural analysis of the systems of patterning Van Doesburg used in the project; see Doig, *Theo van Doesburg*, 58–71. Michael White has more recently strived to argue that the "De Vonk" project demonstrated Van Doesburg's attempt to develop a new relationship between spectator and space; see White, *De Stijl and Dutch Modernism*, 29–34.

80. Beckett, "'De Vonk,' Noordwijk," 208.

81. Beckett, "'De Vonk,' Noordwijk," 208. The building itself, as Taverne, Wagenaar, and De Vletter have noted, was neither a "retrograde" or "conservative" building, nor was it a proto-Cubist, avant-garde plan devised solely of orthogonal forms. Rather, it was typical of Dutch "modern" architecture of the time. They argued: "De Vonk is exactly what it is: a massive, closed, exceptionally 'corporeal' brick building, designed on a rigidly symmetrical ground plan. It stands for everything that passed for a 'modern' building at that moment in Dutch architecture, by virtue of emphasis on massing, (symmetrical) organization, and measurable space as new, strictly architectural means of expression." See Taverne, Wagenaar, and De Vletter, *Poetic Functionalist,* 30 (see chap. 3, n. 148).

Van Doesburg provided exterior decoration for the entrance to the building in the form of three panels (fig. 5.37). Their positioning—one principal panel above the tympanum, and two subsidiary panels on either side of the portal—followed a decorative arrangement around entranceways that was used frequently in Dutch design.[82] To create the panels, Van Doesburg chose to use orthogonally arranged glazed brick in blue, yellow, green, black, and white. His use of colored glazed brick allowed the panels to stand out starkly against the matte surface of the regular rows of brick and mortar that make up the façade. It was possibly inspired by Berlage, who frequently incorporated the material into his projects to add color, including the recently begun hunting lodge, Sint Hubertus, discussed in the previous chapter. Berlage applied glazed brick widely throughout the building's interior, creating thematic spaces that evoked both the building's natural surroundings and the process of the Saint Hubert's conversion (fig. 5.38).[83] Van Doesburg's decision to construct his panels in brick, rather than glazed tile, was possibly made to distance himself from Nieuwue Kunst tile design, which had garnered great popularity and was ubiquitously applied to the façades of Dutch buildings around the turn of the century until the First World War.[84] Commercial buildings frequently used tile panels to advertise, and stylized floral panels were also used decoratively to draw attention to businesses (fig. 5.39). In larger, public architectural projects, tile murals were installed as decoration, as in the case of the Jan Toorop's

82. White, *De Stijl and Dutch Modernism*, 31.

83. My great thanks to the generous tour guide who, during my visit to *Sint Hubertus* in September 2018, responded to my many questions with a great many insights.

84. Hans van Lemmen and Bart Verbrugge, *Art Nouveau Tiles* (London: Laurence King, 1999), 94–110.

(1858–1928) panels for Berlage's Amsterdam Stock Exchange (fig. 5.40), which depicted allegorical scenes of the unity between labor, industry, and progress.

Van Doesburg, however, chose a different approach for his façade panels. He avoided any figurative or allegorical elements that would have indicated the building's intended purpose. In doing so he discarded the geometrically abstracted motifs of typical Dutch labor or leisure that filled many of his earlier ornamental designs—imagery which would have been ideally suited for a building intended explicitly for working-class leisure.[85] Instead, his glazed-brick panels are entirely abstract, operating only according to a logic of patterning. Van Doesburg again used his techniques of mirroring and inversion, and now color variation, to complicate the symmetry of the patterning in his panels and produce the visual appearance of difference. In the two smaller panels on either side of the door, for example, the panel on the right is a mirror of the one opposite it on the left. But to disrupt the legibility of their shared structural symmetry, Van Doesburg altered the coloring of the blue, yellow, and green brick in the right panel from that of the left. The tympanum panel follows this rotational pattern as well. It is structurally organized into four sections, comprising two motifs. On the left half of the panel, these are separated by a vertical column of white brick, punctuated by a vertically oriented yellow brick and a light blue brick end. The leftmost motif has been mirrored and inverted on the far right side of the panel (notice the horizontal blue brick in both the upper left and lower right). Similarly, the motif to the center left has also been mirrored and rotated, though now around a shared, centrally positioned white brick end.

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85. Beckett posits that the positioning of the tympanum panel was meant to raise the sight line of the spectator upwards, demarcating a "symbolic zone between the entrance and the Director's rooms." Beckett, "'De Vonk,' Noordwijk," 215.

Van Doesburg's designs marked a shift in his practice. As discussed above, in his designs for patterning he had initially been drawn to Van der Leck's process of pictorial decomposition. In his panels for the entranceway of De Vonk, though, Van Doesburg implemented a fundamentally different approach, one that abandoned Van der Leck's formal strategy of simplified motifs depicted on a white ground in favor of a more complex field of contiguous chromatic planes. Although the modularity of the brick lent itself to such a process—possibly a reason why he chose the material in the first place—this compositional logic appeared to have come from Huszar's own contemporaneous formal experiments.

It was during this time that Huszar began exploring what Sjarel Ex termed "the figure/ground problem."[86] Ex summarized the problem in the following manner:

> [The artists of De Stijl] saw flatness as a universal quality, and they found it lacking in the individualistic expression of traditional painting. In principle, they all agreed that the difference between the form and its surroundings—between figure and ground—should be eliminated in painting. They differed, however, on the question of how this should be done, how a completely flat painting should look.[87]

Huszar arrived at the solution to this formal issue toward the end of 1917 by simplifying the number of colors used in his compositions; setting them in contiguous, but seemingly overlapping arrangements in order to confuse the figure/ground binary so that neither foreground nor background could be discernably established. Van Doesburg found Huszar's solution significant, reproducing the latter's painting *Hammer and Saw (Still*

86. Ex, "Huszar," in Blotkamp, *Formative Years,* 195–97 (see chap. 3, n. 1).
87. Ex, "Huszar," 95.

Life Composition) (1917; fig. 5.41) in color for an article in *De Stijl* in 1918—the only color reproduction in the journal's run.[88]

Huszar's figure/ground solution has been discussed in the literature on De Stijl only in regard to the group's painting, often positioned as an important step in modernist painting toward a progressive Greenbergian ideal of pictorial flatness.[89] Yet, to my knowledge, there has been no attempt to explain the origins of Huszar's understanding of this solution. On September 25, 1917, Huszar articulated the logic behind his solution to Van der Leck, writing:

> What you are saying about placing in back/placing in front, whereby the equivalence of the parts is perturbed (because the planes cut through each other)—with me that is just meant as a plastic principle. . . . You therefore should not view it as planes on a ground, but as equal parts, because the background plays the same role as do the planes. What is in front goes to the rear, and vice versa, with the result that absolute planarity is mastered.[90]

The device at the crux of his solution was the establishment of visual equity among forms in the composition, to allow viewers to simultaneously construct different patterns based on whichever form is given their attention

I want to suggest that theories of ornamental patterning may have provided Huszar with the foundation for such a fundamentally optical solution. It is reasonable to assume that during his studies as a decorator in Budapest, Huszar would have encountered texts on ornament, by either Jones, his pupil Christopher Dresser (1834–

88. Theo van Doesburg, "'Hammer en Zaag': Sillevenkompositie door V. Huszar" [Hammer and saw. Still life composition by V. Huszar], *De Stijl* 1, no. 3 (January 1918): 35–36.

89. Yve-Alain Bois in particular described Huszar's abandonment of this device as a backward step; see Bois, "The De Stijl Idea," in *Painting as Model*, 104 (see chap. 2, n. 7).

1904), or a Hungarian disciple, that explored these optical concerns.[91] In Dresser's important and widely circulated *The Art of Decorative Design* (1862), he outlined the possibilities for multiple forms to emerge and recede from the singular plane of a pattern depending upon which element the viewer chose to give his attention to:

> It is not only desirable to reduce a form to its lowest unit, but it is well to ascertain whether it can be formed of diversified elements. The form may be conceived to result from a combination of shapes . . . , with spaces between them, or of the two units shown . . . , or of squares connected by crosses or of diagonal members of the character set forth by . . . crossing [figs. 5.42a–c].[92]

Dresser's optical theories bear similar fruit to Huszar's, particularly when one looks at his linocut *Composition VI* (1917; fig. 5.43). This simplified compositional scheme compels a dualistic reading of either a white background with black shapes on it or, vice versa, a black background with white shapes, when in fact both exist simultaneously.

Huszar's optical solutions had a direct impact on Van Doesburg's work for De Vonk, as exemplified by a small painting based on one of the motifs found in the monumental tile floor (fig. 5.44). The painting's structuring logic shares a strong homology with that of Huszar's *Hammer and Saw*, including the extension of the painting onto the frame. Writing in *De Stijl* about *Hammer and Saw*, Van Doesburg responded to Huszar's visual device with excitement. The passage warrants an extended quotation, as it sheds light on the significance of his design for the panels of De Vonk:

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90. Quoted and translated in Ex, "Huszar," 97.

91. Els Hoek and Sjarel Ex have downplayed the impact Huszar's decorative arts training had on his career; see Ex and Hoek, *Vilmos Huszar*, 11–13. I think this position is overstated, however, particularly considering how involved in interior design he became in the postwar years.

92. Christopher Dresser, *The Art of Decorative Design* (London: Day and Son, 1862), 54–55.

In order to visualize these two movements, the vertical hammer movement and the horizontal saw movement against it, in space (since they also take place in space), the painter does not have the color planes put down as positive parts of the painting on a negative background (this would create a rigidity). However, there is an alternating effect between positive and negative, because of the destruction of the background, that is between the color plane and plastic space. When we attentively consider this reproduction, which gives a clear representation of the original, we shall see that this interaction also indeed manifests itself. It is yellow for a moment, then back again, now red for a moment, then back again, etc. The rectangular image space is filled with movement, a movement which is the sum of the vertical hammer movements and the sawing movements that go into it. So here is a different life expressed than the life of nature; namely, the life of movement with exactly plastic means. Is this work exclusively visual? No. Absolutely not. Visual is only that work which arises from an exclusively sensory perception. With a purely sensory perception, there is no process in the soul of the artist. *However, the aesthetic experience is one of the whole being.* When seeing the hammering and sawing, the artist mentally guided these movements. Through the exact representation of this process he forces the viewer to live along with these aesthetic movements. This is the plastic conversion of reality. This is *realism*.[93]

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93. "Om deze twee bewegingen, de vertical hamer-beweging en de horizontale zaag-beweging daar tegenin, in de ruimte te beelden (aangezien zij ook in de ruimte plaats hebben) heft de schilder de kleurvlakken niet als positieve deelen van de schilderij op een negatieven achtergrond neergezet (hierdoor zou een verstarring zijn onstaan), doch er heeft, door vernietiging van den achtergrond een wisselwerking plaats tusschen positief en negatief, dat is tusschen kleurvlak en beeldingsruimte. Wanneer wij deze reproductive, die een duidelijke voorstelling van het origineel geeft, aandachting beschouwen, zullen wij zien, dat deze wisselwerking zich ook inderdaad beeldt. Nu eens is het geel voor; dan weder achter; nu eens het rood voor, dan weder achter enz. De rechthoekige beeldingsruimte is met beweging gevuld, een beweging, die het summum is van de verticale hamer-bewegingen en de daartegen ingaande zaagbewegingen. Hier is dus een ander leven uitgedrukt dan het leven der natuur; n.l, het leven der beweging met exact beeldende middelen. Is dit werk uitsluitend visueel? Neen. Volstrekt niet. Visueel is slechts dat werk 't welk ontstaan uit een uitsluitend zintuigelijke waarneming. Bij een uitsluitend zintuigelijke waarneming, heeft er geen proces plaats in de ziel van den kunstenaar. *De esthetische ervaring is er echter een van het heele wezen*. Bij het zien van het hameren en zagen maakte de kunstenaar die bewegingen psychisch mede. Door de exacte beelding van dit proces dwingt hij den

Van Doesburg's interest in Huszar's technique for his panels was fundamentally one of reshaping the aesthetic experience of the "whole being," that is not merely optically but physically as well. Ornamentation, as Lambrusse has suggested in the context of other avant-garde artists, was understood by Van Doesburg as a "*new way of looking*: a gaze could be called 'decorative' in as much as the work of art did not aim to captivate but instead to liberate the being-in-the-world of the spectator . . . endowing the living space with a new energetic quality."[94]

Stacey Sloboda observed, "To ornament is to put something in its proper social relation, to enact its status or its function through the marking of the surface. In this way, decoration has a performative aspect—it calls into being that which it represents."[95] With this understanding, I want to return then to the function of Van Doesburg's triptych for De Vonk. Critics have argued that his efforts to obfuscate the underlying symmetry of the panels through rotational and chromatic variation were intended to destabilize the otherwise symmetrical façade and floor plan of Oud's design. Such a proposition was certainly at play in Van Doesburg's thinking, as discussed above, as was the interest in visual movement expressed in his essay on *Hammer and Saw*, which he sought to create upon the façade in opposition to the building's otherwise static frontality. To ascribe the total subversion of the façade as the sole intent of the exterior panels, however, is to substitute an idealized vision of the project for the reality of its execution.[96] Equally

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beschouwer deze bewegingen esthetisch mede te leven. Dit is beeldende omzetting van de realiteit. Dit is *realisme*." Van Doesburg, "'Hammer en Zaag,'" 36.

94. Lambrusse, "Grammars of Ornament," 330. This topic of perception in movement will be addressed in greater detail in the following chapters.

95. Sloboda, "'Grammar of Ornament,'" 227.

96. I agree with Michael White's assessment: "It is asking a lot of [these panels] that they be read as undermining the symmetry of the façade, especially given that the smaller pair reflects each

important, I wish to suggest, was the mere annunciation of difference which the panels enacted.

In nineteenth-century decorative theory, the entrance portal—the liminal space between exterior and interior— was the crucial boundary between the tumult of the modernity without and the protective comfort within. In placing his façade panels around it, Van Doesburg announced the space within not with the typical signifiers of Nieuwe Kunst escape—flattened motifs of rural or colonial flora or fauna. Rather, he used them to introduce spectators to, and prepare them for, a new mode of visual and bodily interaction with the built environment to be discovered inside—one decorated with his monumental tile floor for the building's corridors and rooms (figs. 5.45a–5.45c). The composition of the tile floor, at first, appears immensely complex and free of any governing principles. However, as Allan Doig has diagrammed in extensive detail, Van Doesburg used five standardized motifs for the floor (fig. 5.46).[97] As with his glazed-brick façade panels, he employed here a similar method of rotation, inversion, and chromatic variation, but now with greater intricacy. The effect of the floor was enhanced by Van Doesburg's color designs for the building's doors, which were painted in alternating arrangements of white, black, gray, and yellow to match the floor. He highlighted his achievement in the pages of *De Stijl*, reproducing two images of the interior tile floor to illustrate his important essay "Notes on Monumental Art."[98] In describing the visual effects produced by his design for De Vonk, he wrote, "In the

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other exactly (as did the colors Van Doesburg painted the window shutters)" (*De Stijl and Dutch Modernism*, 33).

97. See Allan Doig, *Theo van Doesburg*, 58–81.

98. Van Doesburg, "Aanteekeningen over Monumentale Kunst," 10–12 (see n. 3 above).

future, through the consistent perseverance and development of this complementary combination of architecture and painting, it will be possible to reach, on a purely modern basis, the goal of monumental art: to place man within (instead of opposite) the plastic arts and thereby enable him to participate in them."[99]

The language Van Doesburg chose to describe his work at De Vonk is revealing. As discussed in the previous chapter, it evokes the heterotopic nature of the artist's conception of this space. The building was itself a heterotopic site. As a location where working women could remove themselves from the social and economic demands of their day-to-day lives, De Vonk offered a restorative and regenerative escape. Passing beneath the abstract entrance panels, visitors would have experienced an interior that, as Van Doesburg wrote, emanated "a religious gravity."[100] Van Doesburg's description of the interior of De Vonk in such affective terms drew from his understanding of Wilhelm Worringer's (1881–1965) widely influential dissertation *Abstraction and Empathy: A Contribution to the Psychology of Style*.[101] Van Doesburg saw in Worringer's thesis a

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99. "Bij consequente doorzetting en ontwikkeling dezer complementaire samengang van architectuur en schilderkunst zal, in de toekomst, het doel der monumentale kunst: den mensch in (inplaats van tegenover) de beeldende kunst te plaatsen en hem daardoor aan haar te doen deelnemen, op zuiver modernen grondslag bereikt kunnen worden." Van Doesburg, "Aanteekeningen over Monumentale Kunst," 12.

100. Letter from Van Doesburg to Kok, July 31, 1918. Reprinted in Hoek, *Theo van Doesburg*, 220.

101. Worringer defined the value of the work of art by its ability to provide pleasure and happiness, historically equating this task with that of religion. He wrote: "The value of a work of art, what we call its beauty, lies, generally speaking, in its power to bestow happiness. The values of this power naturally stand in a causal relation to the psychic needs which they satisfy. Thus the 'absolute artistic volition' [*kunstwollen*] is the gauge for the quality of these psychic needs. . . . It would be a history of the feeling about the world and, as such, would stand alongside the history of religion as its equal. By the feeling about the world I mean the psychic state in which, at any given time, mankind found itself in relation to the cosmos, in relation to the phenomena of the external world. This psychic state is disclosed in the quality of psychic needs, i.e. in the constitution of the absolute artistic volition [*kunstwollen*], and bears outward fruit in the work of art, to be exact in the style of the latter, the specific nature of which is simply the specific nature

crucial similarity between the environmental insecurity that pushed "primitive man" into psychological distress and the current conditions of social upheaval under which "modern man" existed.[102] The destabilization of western European social, political, and philosophical conventions in the wake of the First World War made geometric abstraction all the more necessary in order to reinstate a sense of rational order in society.[103] Such a position critically shaped his conceptualization of the space within De Vonk, and the built environment in general. First, Worringer's theory, which placed equal significance on the act of perception and that of representation, foregrounded Van Doesburg's concern for the psychological state of the viewing subject. Second, it emphasized the need for a totalizing expression of the urge to abstraction in the built environment, in order to offer complete aesthetic refuge from the psychological unease brought on by the agitation and instability of modern life. Finally, Worringer's theory of the urge to abstraction provided a critical defense against those who perceived such expansive endeavors to move abstraction beyond the frame and into the built

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of the psychic needs." Wilhelm Worringer, *Abstraction and Empathy: A Contribution to the Psychology of Style*, trans. Michael Bullock (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1997), 13.

102. Worringer himself believed that "man is now just as lost and helpless *vis-à-vis* the world-picture as primitive man. . . ." Worringer, *Abstraction and Empathy*, 18.

103. In Van Doesburg's reading of Worringer, he further sought to justify the emergence of abstraction by interjecting a Hegelian teleology to the binary opposition of abstraction and empathy. "So, art passes through the following stages: (1) Longing for imitation; (2) Urge to abstract; (3) Style. We live in the transition from 2 to 3. It is therefore of more importance to observe which manner completes this style and finally becomes culture. . . ." [Zoo maakt de kunst de volgende stadia door: (1) Zucht tot nabootsing; (2) Drang naar abstractie; (3) Stijl. Wij leven in den overgang van 2 naar 3. Het is daarom aan meer belang op te merken op welke qijze zich deze stijl voltrekt en ten slotte tot cultuur. . . .]. Van Doesburg, "Repliek aan den heer H. C. Verkruijsenen," 33.

environment as merely decorative (a pejorative use of the term intended to categorize an art as gendered female, bourgeois in class, and contentless in form).[104]

De Vonk garnered much attention in the pages of *De Stijl*, for it marked a critical advance toward Van Doesburg's goal of creating such a totalizing chromatic environment based on dynamic patterns of geometric abstract forms. Upon and within Oud's building, Van Doesburg believed he had achieved a design that was, although not a complete break from past historical traditions, a fusion of abstraction and asymmetry that was necessary under the conditions of modernity. Furthermore, the environmental scale of the interior tile floor permitted the work to be experienced by the "whole being" of the spectator within an encapsulating aesthetic space. Thus his designs for De Vonk succeeded in moving beyond the *vlak ornament* embraced by the Nieuwe Kunst, which he felt aimed only to construct a mode of seeing capable of conditioning a limited modern *Dutch* subject. Rather, with De Vonk, Van Doesburg felt he had discovered a path toward an

104. "The great significance of painting is that it rightly assumes that a three-dimensional, bodily reality must come out to a planar occupation in a planar space, if it does not want to fall duly into error; that painting merges into reality. In the "ornamental," it only decays when it becomes subordinate to a form of expression (for example, as accompaniment to architecture) and thus expresses the universal secondary. To speak with contempt about the ornamental shows a lack of insight. Ornament, especially where this occurs purely plastically, cannot then arise under very favorable (= inner) cultural conditions. Following Worringer, one knows the spirit of a people from their ornament" [De groote beteekenis der schilderkunst is juist, dat zij van een drie-dimensionale, lichamelijke realiteit uitgaande, aan een vlakbezetting in een vlakruimte moet uitkomen, wil zij niet vervallen in de fout, dat het schilderij in de realiteit overgaat. In het "ornamentale" vervalt zijn slechts dan, wanneer zij ondergeschikt wordt aan een anderen uitdruikkingsvorm (b.v. aan de bouwkunst als begeleiding) end is het universeele secundair tot uitdrukking brengt. Met minachting over het ornamentale te spreken, geeft blijk van gemis aan inzicht; het ornament vooral waar dit zuiver beeldend optreedt, kan niet dan onder zeer gunstige (= innerlijke) cultuur-voorwaarden onstaan. Volgens Worringer kent men de geestesgesteldheid van een volk aan zijn ornament]. Van Doesburg, "Antwoord aan Mejuffrouw Edith Pijpers," 69–70 (see chap. 1, n. 43).

entirely abstract and dynamic program of ornament that could establish a modern phenomenology for the new, *universal* man.[105]

Triangulating De Stijl Ornament

In 1918, following the success of their collaboration on De Vonk, Oud invited Van Doesburg to contribute color schemes for the façades and interiors of housing blocks 1 and 5 in the recently developed Spangen district in Rotterdam. The previous year, in the pages of *De Stijl*, Oud had argued that modern urban design necessitated the movement away from individual housing in favor of larger apartment dwellings, to address the present dearth of housing available for the influx of rural labor migrating to Dutch cities.[106] Influenced by Camillo Sitte's *City Planning According to Artistic Principles* (1889) as well as Berlage's Amsterdam Stock Exchange (fig. 5.47), Oud developed a concept of urban planning that shifted focus from the square to the boulevard.[107] The apartment block became the fundamental unit for Oud's conception of the cityscape. He wrote:

> The spirit of the times is directed at broadening: that is the product of deepening. As a result it is once again thrown back on the crowd and consciously bases its developmental efforts on the existing cultural core that determines modern social and spiritual life. Thus, the modern spirit, including in architecture, sets its goal

105. This vision of a universal man was, of course, specific and limited. It was intrinsically gendered male, distinctly European, and thus white. Its framework was conceived of as inventive, that being fecund, or heterosexual.

106. "In determining the character of the modern street picture, the starting point will have to be, for theoretical and practical reasons, the street picture as a whole. On theoretical grounds, as has been shown above; on practical grounds, because in modern urban development private enterprise will play an increasingly small part of the building of the individual house." J. J. P. Oud, "Het Monumentale staadsbeeld," *De Stijl* 1, no. 1 (October 1917): 10. Translated in Jaffé, *De Stijl*, 95–96 (see chap. 1, n. 1).

107. White, *De Stijl and Dutch Modernism*, 44–59.

> further and does not confine itself to the individual (inside: house), but to the crowd (outside: the street—the city). In street development the individual, even the aesthetically designed, house is contraband, and continuous street development as conscious *street expression*, a must. . . . Continuous street development, both of public housing and of better housing, will become the rule, piecemeal development more and more the exception.[108]

As the newly appointed municipal architect for Rotterdam, Oud found the first opportunity to enact his vision in the Spangen project. With his designs for blocks 1 and 5 (figs. 5.48a, 5.48b), he tried to establish a model of communal architecture founded on the standardization of form.[109] The result would be a pair of housing blocks in which the rhythmic arrangement of the buildings' façades was dictated by the rational structure of the buildings' interiors. Furthermore, because of their flatness and horizontality these buildings would become the background for a new conception of urban design oriented around the street. The overall architectural aim, Michael White argued, was to reflect the building's efficiency and affordability through its standardized appearance, while simultaneously marking it as different from contemporaneous projects by the Amsterdam School that incorporated symbolic motifs and eccentric brickwork into their large-scale housing blocks, such as Michel de Klerk's (1884–1923) Het Schip (1917–21; fig. 5.49) or

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108. J. J. P. Oud, "Architectonische beschouwing: Massabouw en straatarchitectuur" [Architectonic consideration: Mass construction and street architecture], *De Stijl* 2, no. 7 (May 1919): 79. Translated in Taaverne, Wagenaar, and De Vletter, *Poetic Functionalist,* 209.

109. "Uniformity of parts was pursued for practical and aesthetic reasons (the latter on the grounds that a street elevation should not command attention for itself but, by means of a certain unobtrusiveness and uniform rhythmicality, set up a contrast with, and support the architectonic effect of, any major corner treatments or freestanding buildings)." J. J. P. Oud, "Gemeentelijke volkeoningbouw polder 'Spangen,' Rotterdam," [Municipal social housing, Spangen polder, Rotterdam], *Bouwkundig Weekblad* 42 (1920): 37. Translated in Taaverne, Wagenaar, and De Vletter, *Poetic Functionalist,* 226.

De Dageraad (1919–21), the latter of which was designed with Piet Kramer (1881–1961).[110]

Van Doesburg responded to Oud's request with color designs that retained a formal strategy similar to the one he had employed at De Vonk. Now, however, no longer limited to selected architectural features, he was freed to use the entire façade as a ground on which to arrange his color schemes.[111] He illustrated and explained his ideas for blocks 1 and 5 in a diagram and accompanying letter sent to Oud in August 1918 (fig. 5.50). Three black bands wrap the entire lower edge of the façade, accentuating the horizontality of the block. This sense of horizontality was furthered by the use of black around the dormer windows.[112] Van Doesburg wanted to balance this strong horizontality, as well as counter the repetition of the façade's features, by applying color to three principal architectural features: the window rabbets, doors, and transom windows. For the rabbets of the façade windows, Van Doesburg alternated between black and a "triad" of gray, green, and yellow.[113] Above the set of four doors, where there are two groups of four windows, he applied black to the rabbets, creating a vertical

110. White, *De Stijl and Dutch Modernism*, 56. In his essay "The Monumental Cityscape," Oud wrote, "In the Netherlands there is a place and a need for a monumental style. Evolution in architecture, as in painting, is moving in the direction of the universal and monumental. In this it follows the line set by the Berlage school and is opposed in principle to the Amsterdam School, in which the monumental has been corrupted into what is essentially decadent." Oud, "Het Monumentale staadsbeeld," 10; translated in Jaffé, *De Stijl*, 95. For further discussion on Amsterdam School architecture see De Wit, *The Amsterdam School* (see chap. 2, n. 1).

111. He had initially planned to have the brick walls painted white, to make the patterns stand out more sharply. Due to the cost, however, Oud rejected this idea.

112. Van Doesburg was only made aware afterward that Oud would have to use black roof tiles, rather than the expected red tiles. In a letter dated to August 16, 1919, Van Doesburg urged that the black dormer window fascias be replaced with a color (illustrated in a drawing no longer extant).

counterweight to the horizontal bands. Between each pair of entranceways is a vertical row of windows, arranged in an alternating pattern of green, gray, and yellow, so that adjacent groups do not share the same color. Within each group of six windows, Van Doesburg devised an additional pattern. He chose to paint the vertical and horizontal slats of the window rabbets in alternating colors, a visual device akin to that of a double basket-weave pattern in brick, commonly found as a decorative façade element in Dutch architecture. This "motif" (fig. 5.51), Van Doesburg wrote to Oud, was "the same as the doors, yet entirely free."[114]

He structured the pattern for the doors, which incorporated the same triad of colors used in the window rabbets, with a basic composition begun in the leftmost door. A central panel of color was surrounded by a narrow vertical band on each side of the door, while wide and short horizontal bands are placed on the top and bottom respectively. This arrangement then alternated with its inverse, with the colors of each door changing so as to differ from its neighbor. Finally, above each door, Van Doesburg included a stained-glass window, alternating adjacent windows through mirroring and inversion (figs. 5.52a, 5.52b). In his color design, Van Doesburg paid close attention to the experience of a subject physically passing by a building on a city street. For example, he noted the need to paint the undersides of the dormer fascias, as they were particularly conspicuous to those observing the façade from the sidewalk below. In Spangen, Van Doesburg made use of the stabilizing symmetry and repetition of Oud's housing blocks to

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113. Letter from Van Doesburg to Oud, August 4, 1919. The use of the word "triad," Van Straaten observed, was derived from Wilhelm Ostwald's color theories. See Van Straaten, *Theo van Doesburg*, 61.

114. "Het motief is hetzelfde als in de deuren, doch geheel losgemaakt." Letter from Van Doesburg to Oud dated to August 14, 1919, reprinted in Hoek, *Theo van Doesburg*, 255.

create a dynamic tension through the undulating chromatic pattern applied to the buildings' façades. Although he labeled this effect "destructive," Oud was satisfied with the balance it achieved between his architectonic regularity and Van Doesburg's asymmetric chromatic patterning.

As a result, in 1920 Oud invited Van Doesburg again to contribute to his design of two additional apartment buildings for the Spangen district: housing blocks 8 and 9 (fig. 5.53). He viewed the project as an opportunity to further the ideas he had developed for the earlier Spangen blocks. One of the great successes of the earlier color designs, Van Doesburg felt, was his introduction of the mathematically derived color combinations based on Wilhelm Ostwald's color theory. Ostwald's theories, as discussed in chapter 4, allowed him to move beyond the intuitive application of color in De Vonk and toward a more universal chromatic effect. Using Ostwald's system for blocks 8 and 9, he devised a "dissonant triad," in which yellow and blue would serve as consonant colors, interrupted by the dissonant color green (the combination of yellow and blue). The colors selected were meant to stand out in contrast with the red brick of the buildings' façades. Crucially, now Van Doesburg guided the arrangement of his mathematically devised color pattern through a geometric superstructure derived predominantly from interpenetrating triangular forms. He illustrated this structure in a schematic drawing for the front façade of block 8, along Potgieterstraat (fig. 5.1). In the drawing, a simplified façade of the building is depicted at the top of the sheet. The chromatic pattern is established by two sets of diagonal lines divided in the center of the building, one side blue and the other green. Two semicircles—one blue and green following the direction of the diagonals and

the other yellow moving against them—complete the arrangement.[115] Below, the lines are filled in to give the overall chromatic effect. In two additional drawings that accompanied this schematic diagram, Van Doesburg provided a clearer demonstration of his color arrangement as it would appear on the façade (figs. 5.54, 5.55). On the left side of the drawing, the green and blue painted window frames descend from the roofline toward the street level and then are inverted on the right, with each color applied to its ascending opposite frame. Continuing this V-shaped arrangement, Van Doesburg colored the windows at the two lower corners of the building and those of the central dormer windows yellow. Black, applied to the four central window frames, was used as a fulcrum around which these chromatic "movements" and "counter-movements" turned. Two large areas of black, intended to be painted directly onto the brick and used for advertising, frame the chromatic pattern.

Oud responded hesitantly to Van Doesburg's proposal, noting that he believed the alternating colors in the arrangement did not achieve the same visual balance as in the artist's previous designs. He suggested instead that the artist focus on creating a harmonious sequence, writing: "Do you think that the painterly color alteration is necessary? Wouldn't you find it more logical to do this through succession . . . ?"[116] Van Doesburg clarified the aim of his chromatic patterning in his reply:

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115. On the drawing Van Doesburg wrote, "4) for the sake of convenience the construction is indicated in round lines to make it clearer" [4) Gemakshalve is de constuctie in ronde lijnen aangegeven ter verduiderlijking]. Van Doesburg used this system rather than diagonals to make the diagram more legible to Oud. See Troy, *De Stijl Environment*, 82–83.

116. "Vindt je nu schilderkunstig kleur afwisseling noodig vindt je het dan niet logischer dit te doen door opvolging . . . ?" From an undated letter written by Oud to Van Doesburg. Reprinted in Hoek, *Theo van Doesburg*, 291.

> As you know, I always base things on a *contrasting effect.* Because the street wall already has a dominating character, I wanted (as in the first block) to achieve verticality as much as possible with color. With the brick color I want to achieve the vertical in the color through sharp dissonances. That is why I wanted to keep the blue and green together here. I believe that the horizontal is not pronounced by working this way. . . . The dissonances are therefore always — and | and / so that I can systematically control the entire street wall.[117]

In his forceful insistence on creating dissonance, Van Doesburg wanted to achieve an effect that was twofold. First, in equating his chromatic patterns to that of the musical concept of dissonance, he wished to create a homology between the temporal experience of a musical score and the temporality of the subject moving through the built environment—to be discussed further in the next chapter.[118] Second, through his matrix of directional and counterdirectional arrangements of color, Van Doesburg endeavored to suppress the symmetry of the housing blocks' uniform façades, to accord better with the disjointed and asymmetrical experience of modern urban life. While Oud could accept the first effect, as he had with housing blocks 1 and 4, he could not accept the second. As Michael White argued, "for [Oud's] notion of monumentality to be sustained, the facades of his housing blocks had to be perceived as complete. Van Doesburg's desire to fragment the perpetual experience temporally was totally at odds with the type of

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117. Zoals je weet ga ik altijd van een contrastwerking uit, omdat de straatwand al een domineerend karakter heeft wilde ik steeds (als bij het eerste blik) het vertikale zooveel mogelijk met de kleur bereiken. Door de baksteen-kleur wil ik het vertikale in de kleur door scherpe dissonant bereiken. Vandaar dat ik hier steeds blauw en groen bij elkaar wilde houden. Het horizontale wordt door deze wijze van werken geloof ik niet geprononceerd . . . . De dissonanten zijn dus steeds — en | en / waardoor ik systematisch de geheele straatwand beheerschen kan (emphasis added)." Letter from Van Doesburg to Oud from between May and September 1921. Reprinted in Hoek, *Theo van Doesburg*, 291.

118. White, *De Stijl and Dutch Modernism*, 59.

monumentality Oud hoped to produce at this point."[119] In the same letter to Oud in which he declared himself to be no mere "house painter," Van Doesburg addressed this problem directly: "It is not my fault that the construction is not 'uniform,' which might make the Potgieterstraat façade *more dynamic*. . . . I really did mean it to be like this, as a contrast to the static quality of the Langendijkstraat façade."[120] Van Doesburg's desire to control the "entire street wall"—for which Oud would later call him a dictator—was necessary to create an aesthetic experience which, according to his theories, mirrored the asymmetry and dissonance of modern life, yet which remained explicitly structured through a rational system of underlying geometric forms.

Movement and Counter-Movement: Drachten

As Van Doesburg's designs continued to increase in scale and scope, he even more diligently employed proportional systems in order to provide a superstructure through which he could organize his color schemes and patterns more objectively. The emergence of his use of proportional systems can be seen in the color schemes for the Potgieterstraat façade, as discussed above. But such a system took pride of place in his designs for a contemporaneous housing project in the town of Drachten. As discussed in the previous chapter, the project was designed by De Boer, to whom Van Doesburg had been introduced by his friend the Drachten-based poet Evert Rinsema (1880–1958).[121] Built

119. White, *De Stijl and Dutch Modernism*, 59.

120. "Het is niet mijn schuld dat de bouw niet 'einheitlich' is, waardoor gevel-Potgieterstraat misschien wat dynamischer wordt. Ik heb dit wel degelijk bedoeld, als contrast op het statisch der gevel Langendijkstraat." Letter from Van Doesburg to Oud, November 3, 1921; reprinted in Hoek, *Theo van Doesburg: Oeuvre Catalogue*, 292.

121. Van Straaten has provided an extensive chronology of this project. Van Straaten, *Theo van Doesburg*, 76–83.

along Torenstraat—a small two-lane road in the town—the long, low block of connected two-story apartments in brick and pitched roofing was typical of early twentieth-century Dutch architectural practice (fig. 5.56). A pair of sharply slanted roofs at either end of the block framed the row of apartments, while a central duplex, which protrudes slightly from the center, functioned as the axis around which the block's symmetry was organized.[122] In 1920, De Boer began consulting with Van Doesburg on his architectural project. In July 1921, the architect eventually awarded him a commission to complete the color designs of both the interior and exterior for both the middle-class housing project and the agricultural school that stood across the street. For the exterior color schemes, Van Doesburg sought to unify the entire block through chromatic dissonance, as he had endeavored to do in Rotterdam. He explained to De Boer, "The main thing is for you to understand the intention, which is to bind all the details more into a whole, within a few specific *lines.*"[123]

The lines Van Doesburg referred to in his letter were the guiding geometrical structure within which he organized his color patterns. In a diagram sent to De Boer (fig. 5.57), he wrote, "The colored ink lines indicate the movement of the color and *the logical* proportions in relation to the nature of the building."[124] For the middle-class housing project, Van Doesburg used the line of the slanted roof to set off the two principal chromatic triangular lines which organized his color arrangements. In light pencil, the

122. The block wrapped around on both Oosterstraat and Houtlaan with a pair of detached apartments on each street. Van Doesburg designed the interior and exterior color designs for these buildings as well.

123. Letter from Van Doesburg to De Boer, November 16, 1920. Quoted and translated in Van Straaten, *Theo van Doesburg*, 77.

angle of the slanted roof is extended and met by the dotted red line in the upper left of the diagram. The red dotted line connects the two smaller dormer window frames with a pair of adjoined apartment doors, forming an inverted triangular structure. A yellow dotted line was drawn in opposition to this movement, indicating that the central dormer window frames and opposing window pairs should be painted yellow. Van Doesburg used blue, the third color in his triad of primaries, along with black and white in order to provide a stabilizing area around which the undulating triangular patterns could rotate. In the drawing he indicated this by connecting the white doors, as well as the window frames painted in blue or black, through orthogonal rather than oblique lines. In his diagram for the central duplex, the single dormer window became the anchor for the entire axis around which his color designs were tethered (fig. 5.58). The two outer window frames are painted yellow, linking them to the pair of yellow first-floor windows on either side. At the same time, Van Doesburg colored the frame of the smaller central dormer window red, connecting it to the two red apartment doors of the central duplex, creating a triangle of red. The two colors again revolve around a neutral orthogonal grouping of blue and black window frames. When the entire design is viewed from a distance (fig. 5.59), the red colored windows and doors trace a more compressed series of undulating diagonals, spaced somewhat evenly across the façade. The yellow windows and doors, however, are spread farther apart at slightly differing intervals—a result of the nature of the building's façade—creating a more syncopated rhythm.

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124. "De gekleurde inktlijnen geven de beweging der kleuren aan en *de logische* verhouding in verband met den bouwaard." The text was written as an explanatory note on the right of the drawing.

The dormer windows were pivotal in Van Doesburg's use of the triangle as an organizing structure, and guided his design for the agricultural school that faced the row of middle-class housing projects on the opposite side of Torenstraat (fig. 5.60). Van Doesburg explained in a letter to De Boer:

> Since diagonal lines were used in *both* projects, the triangle has also been used as the basis for the color arrangement. The main scheme for the agricultural school is a triangle, particularly if we think of the four façades as whole. This basic form is characteristic of brick construction, and is also due to the dormer windows, which always strongly determine the direction.[125]

In a diagram for the agricultural school, Van Doesburg employed an interwoven matrix of triangles like that used in the color designs for the middle-class housing block (fig. 5.61). To show the full exterior of the building, the diagram depicted the street-facing façade in the center, framed on either side by the respective elevations of the building's north and south sides. With the middle-class housing block in mind, he chose the secondary colors of green, orange, and purple in order to create an "*absolute* harmony" between the two buildings.[126] For the façade of the agricultural school, he created a triangular arrangement of green window frames moving from the outer two lower

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125. "Daar in beide projecten met diagonale lijnen gewerkt is ligt de driehoek ten grondslag ook aan de kleur indeeling. Het hoofdschema der landbouwwinterschool is een driehoek vooral wanner we de 4 gevels als eén geheel denken. Het is typisch dat de baksteenbouw dezen grondvorm meestal volgt wat ook komt door de dakvensters, die altijd sterk richtingbepalend werken." Letter from Van Doesburg to De Boer, November 6, 1921. Reprinted in Hoek, *Theo van Doesburg: Oeuvre Catalogue*, 297.

126. "In order to achieve this harmony (both inside and outside) (but especially outside), it is necessary to apply the *secondary triad* green—orange—violet here. This gives me a great dealt of pleasure and as I have a duplicate of the colors for [the middle-class houses] I can fine tune the triad so that it forms an *absolute* harmony" [Om deze harmonie (zoowel binnen als buiten) (maar vooral buiten) te bereiken is het noodig hier de *secundaire drieklank* groen—oranje—violet toe te passen. Daar heb ik erg veel plezier in en daar ik van de kleuren een duplicaatje heb kan ik de drieklank zoo stemmen dat het een *absolute* harmonie vormt]. Letter from Van Doesburg to De Boer, September 21, 1921. Reprinted in Hoek, *Theo van Doesburg: Oeuvre Catalogue*, 296–97.

windows to the central dormer window. This arrangement is balanced by the inverted triangular arrangement of purple, which begins with the front doors and moves outward to the central, second-floor windows. In a return to ideas he had explored in block 8 in Spangen, Van Doesburg employed a pair of facing, concave curvilinear lines which trace an orange movement from the outer dormer window frames to the middle window frames on the first floor. The triangular lines of green and purple are continued along the sides of the buildings. Now, however, the curvilinear arrangement of orange window frames moves outward from the side dormer windows to a pair of first-floor windows at the back of the building.[127] The effect is one that pulls a viewer toward the entrances at both the front and rear of the building. Van Doesburg provided further illustration of the overall structural movement of the pattern in a schematic diagram (figs. 5.62, 5.63). In an explanatory note on this drawing, he wrote that the aim of the three differing movements was to create a triad of contrasting effects which neutralize one another, balancing the whole of the exterior. This harmonizing effect was anchored to the proportion of 3:5:8. In the schematic drawing, Van Doesburg wrote "As one color movement constantly clashes with the other this creates a certain restfulness. The same is true of the proportion

127. Van Doesburg wrote in a letter to De Boer dated November 6, 1921, "The third movement which summarizes the two former is that made by the orange. As everything is concentrated around the main entrance, the orange works concentrically here, that is it makes a movement inward (see diagram). . . . It is easy to detect what I intended for the side walls as, just as in the middle-class houses, I have applied a system of movement and countermovement. In contrast to the concentricity of the orange in the front façade, the orange in the side walls works its way outward (see diagram) so eccentrically [*sic*], thus also fully in harmony with the architecture" [De derde beweging die de beide vorige samenvat is die welke het oranje maakt. Daar op den hoofdingang alles geconcentreerd is werkt het oranje hier concentrisch dwz. maakt een beweging naar binnen (zie schema). . . . Voor de zijgevels laat zich mijn bedoeling nu gemakkelijk vinden daar steeds, evenals bij de middenstandswoningen, het systeem van beweging en tegenbeweging is toegepast. In tegenstelling met het concentrische van het oranje in den voorgevel, werkt in den zijgevels het oranje naar buiten (zie schema), alzoo exentrisch [sic], dus ook weder geheel in harmonie met de architectuur.] Reprinted in Hoek, *Theo van Doesburg: Oeuvre Catalogue*, 297.

between the colors (± 3 [orange] 5 [violet] 8 [green] and their underlying relationship."[128] A similar numerical structure was also included in a second schematic drawing for the rear of the building.

Nancy Troy argued that this proportional system of Van Doesburg's could be "traced to his frequent invocation of musical structures as a model for organizing his color compositions."[129] Meanwhile, Allan Doig observed a connection between Van Doesburg's numerical system and the Fibonacci series. He argued that Van Doesburg may have been made aware of these numerical systems through the March 1921 issue of *L'Esprit Nouveau*, of which he was in possession.[130] Both, however, overlook the frequent use of such numerical proportions in the genre of grammars of ornament, and decorative arts pedagogy in general. Owen Jones, for example, in *The Grammar of Ornament*, employed numerical ratios to guide a decorator's use of color. His eighteenth proposition reads: "The primaries of equal intensities will harmonize or neutralize each other, in the proportions of 3 yellow, 5 red, and 8 blue. . . ."[131] Looking within the Netherlands, the possible origin of Van Doesburg's system of numerical proportions and geometry becomes more evident. During the opening decades of the twentieth century,

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128. "Daar steeds de eene kleurbeweging de andere weder te veel doet onstaat in het geheel rust. Hetzelfde geldt voor de propostie [sic] der kleuren (± 3 [oranje] 5 [violet] 8 groen]) en hun onderlinge . . . verhouding." The inscription is located in the upper right of the drawing.

129. Troy, *De Stijl Environment*, 92.

130. Doig, *Theo van Doesburg*, 94.

131. The full proposition continues: "The secondaries in the proportions of 8 orange, 13 purple, 11 green,—integrally as 32. The tertiaries, citrine (compound of orange and green), 19; russet (orange and purple), 21; olive (green and purple), 24;—integrally as 64. It follows that, each secondary being a compound of two primaries is neutralized by the remaining primary in the same proportions: thus, 8 of orange by 8 of blue, 11 of green by five of red, 13 of purple by 3 of yellow. Each tertiary being a binary compound of two secondaries, is neutralized by the remaining secondary; as, 24 of olive by 8 of orange, 21 of russet by 11 of green, 19 of citrine by 13 of purple." Jones, *Grammar of Ornament,* 5.

the "Egyptian triangle"—composed of sides in the ratio of 5:8:3—came into widespread use as a proportional system among decorative painters and architects within the country.[132] These ideas were introduced by Viollet-le-Duc in the ninth of his *Discourses on Architecture*, and were then disseminated to a Dutch audience by his follower Pierre Cuypers, who was pivotal in establishing the Quellinus School.[133] Two of his pupils, Karel de Bazel and Mathieuw Lauweriks, both of whom also taught design at the Quellinus School, promoted these systems of proportion further. They published their ideas for a wider audience in the pages of *De Architect* and *Architectura*, two journals associated with Architectura et Amicitia, a society for designers and architects.[134]

By the turn of the nineteenth century, proportional systems rooted in the triangle gained widespread popularity with the publication of the 1896 booklet *Triangles in the Design of Ornament for Personal Study and for Schools* (figs. 5.64a–c) written by J. H. de Groot and his sister, Jocoba de Groot.[135] The small booklet contained forty-five plates illustrating different patterns, with accompanying explanatory remarks regarding the processes underlying each pattern or figure design. De Groot provided a short introduction summarizing the theoretical approach that underlay the diagrams to come. He emphasized the inventive potential of geometry for creating new forms, specifically with the triangle as a foundational shape. To emphasize this point, De Groot stated

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132. Suzanne Frank, "J. L. M. Lauweriks and the Dutch School of Proportion," *AA Files*, no. 7 (September 1984): 63.

133. Viollet-Le-Duc, *Discourses on Architecture*, 402–71 (see chap. 2, n. 52). See also, Van der Woude, *The Art of* Building, 51–2 (see chap. 2, n. 11).

134. Jan de Bruijn, "Theosofische Symboliek en Getallenmystiek: De Bazel en Lauweriks" [Theosophical symbolism and numerical mysticism: De Bazel and Lauweriks], in De Bruijn, *Art Nouveau in Nederland*, 126–31 (see n. *29* above).

135. J. H. de Groot and Jocoba M. de Groot, *Driehoek bij het ontwerpen van ornament voor zelfstudie en voor scholen* (Amsterdam: Johannes G. Stemler, 1896).

explicitly that none of the illustrations in the text were derived from historical examples.[136] He furthered this position by arguing that designers of ornament must refrain from copying their designs from nature. "*Styling after nature is for many a plagiarism of nature*," he wrote in his introduction. "Anyone who wants to *create* cannot derive directly from it."[137] For De Groot, geometry, and geometry alone, was the necessary starting point for any successful design. This view led him to his most influential assertion: that in the design of ornament, rhythm, established by geometric principles in unity with the whole, was primary, while the formation of motifs remained secondary. He wrote:

> The method of making the plates is done in the reverse way than that which is usually followed. One usually takes a form from nature and makes it suitable for his purpose, namely, *first* motif, *then* rhythm. In this work the lines are first established in unity with the whole: *first the rhythm and then the motif* is made or refashioned in order to fit in that rhythm. That there is ornament [in this book] for which there are no examples found in nature proves its entirely line-based decoration. For that reason, much has already been given. We have only handled ornament obtainable by the drawing-triangles of 45 and 60 degrees.[138]

De Groot's emphasis on unity of ornament and structure achieved through the triangle proved remarkably fruitful during the first decades of the twentieth century, for a

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136. De Groot, *Driehoek*, 9.

137. "*Styleeren naar de natuur, is bij velen natuurplagiaat. . . .* Wie *scheppen* wil mag niet rechtstreeks ontleenen." De Groot, *Driehoek*, 9.

138. "De methode bij 't maken der platen is de omgekeerde weg, dien men geoonlijk volgt. Men neemt meestal een vorm de natuur en maakt dien geschikt voor zijn doe, n.l. *eerst* motief, *dan* rhythmus. In dit werkje zijn eerst de lijnen in eenheid met het geheel vastgesteld: *eerst de rhythmus en daarna is 't motief* gemaakt of vervormd zooals 't in die rhythmus past. Dat er ornament is, wat niet zijn voorbeeld vindt natuur, bewijzen alle lijnversieringen in dit. Om die reden is er nog al veel van gegeven. Wij hebben alleen behandeld ornament te verkrijgen door de teeken-driehoeken van 45˚ en 60˚." De Groot, *Driehoek*, 9–10.

generation of Dutch designers and architects who wished to establish a geometric aesthetic in opposition to the curvilinear lines of French and Belgian Art Nouveau.

It is very likely that Van Doesburg had firsthand knowledge of this text. He owned a copy of another text by De Groot, *The Composition and Centralization of Form* (1922).[139] Furthermore, it is probable that he would have encountered De Groot's ideas through Berlage. In 1908, the architect published his important *Foundations and Development of Architecture*, which outlined the significance of "triangulation" in the conception of architecture and the decorative arts.[140] In this wide-ranging essay, he refers to the work of Viollet-le-Duc, De Bazel, and Lauweriks, while citing De Groot's text directly. Of most interest to Berlage—as it certainly would have been to Van Doesburg—was De Groot's assertion that there exists an "endless number of variations that can be achieved in the rhythmic decision of flat planes using the customary triangles."[141] Continuing his discussion of De Groot's ideas further, Berlage noted:

> The rhythmic progression proves itself such an extraordinarily convenient and harmonic method of dividing planes that it is ideally suited to two-dimensional patterns—I am thinking of floor and wall tiles, and so on. As I have already said, a work of architecture comes to have style when not only the large-scale

139. Doig, *Theo van Doesburg*, 235, n. 7.

140. Berlage introduced the significance of mathematics in general, and the triangle specifically, writing: "It says that in a work of architecture, the mathematical laws that control the parts and their relationships must be either exactly those by which the whole building is formed or only such laws whose simple and clear relationship to the overall scheme can be recognized and proved. In the case of triangulation with an equilateral triangle, this proportional law will be definitive for the formation of the individual parts." Berlage, "The Foundations and Development of Architecture," in *Hendrik Petrus Berlage*, 205 (see chap. 2, n. 12).

141. Berlage, "Foundations and Development of Architecture," 210.

> articulation of the masses but also the details are formed according to the same system.[142]

Berlage reproduced a design for the Amsterdam Stock Exchange (fig. 5.65) to demonstrate the success of De Groot's "Egyptian triangle." In order to unify the entire building through geometric principles, he used a latticework of intersecting triangles to arrange the elements of the façade.

It should be little surprise that for his large-scale projects in Rotterdam and Drachten, Van Doesburg would have turned to models put forward by popular theories of ornament. From Jones's publication of *The Grammar of Ornament* through De Groot, and beyond, the genre had consistently advocated a set of modernist goals like those that would come to be expressed in De Stijl's aesthetic theory. As Nicholas Frankel noted, since the publication of Jones's structural theory of ornament, decorative form had come to be defined "as a matter of spatial arrangement and proportion alone," and free of that which "smacks of subjectivism."[143] Furthermore, Remí Lambrusse outlines how this idea of a universalizing structure "could easily be replaced by equivalent categories like architectural geometry or the musical scale," and thus could find sympathy among artists of the avant-garde.[144] The ubiquity of this discourse laid an intellectual foundation for thinking through the totalizing expansion of art into the built environment in terms of structure rather than symbolic form. Inflected through Van Doesburg's knowledge of vanguard aesthetic theories circulating through Europe, it played an important role in the conception of his first significant monumental environmental designs.

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142. Berlage, *"*Foundations and Development of Architecture," 212.
143. Frankel, "Ecstasy of Decoration," 7 (see n. 17 above).
144. Lambrusse, "Grammars of Ornament," 324–25.

Conclusion

Shortly after completing his work in Drachten, Van Doesburg began to alter his creative practice, phasing out the methods of patterning and systems of proportion discussed above. The reasons for this change are, of course, multifaceted. For one, other prominent advocates of these proportional systems, like Lauweriks, became increasingly involved in both the Amsterdam School and its publication *Wendingen*.[145] As the Amsterdam School was the principal rival to De Stijl within the Netherlands, Van Doesburg may have felt compelled to differentiate his practice from theirs.[146] Equally significant was his increased independence in the design of architectural projects. In all of the works discussed in this chapter, Van Doesburg's role was restricted, confined by the narrow scope of a commission or by the logistical and material limitations of the overall project. This changed with his introduction to the young Dutch architect Cornelis van Eesteren (1897–1988) in 1923, and his indoctrination into the circles of artists involved in international constructivism during his stay in Germany from 1921 to 1923. Through these connections, Van Doesburg found a platform through which he began designing entire architectural projects. It was also during this time that he became aware of axonometric projection, which emerged as his preferred system to convey visually the asymmetric and abstract form demanded by modern life. Nevertheless, it is critical for the

145. Lauweriks theorized his own mathematical models through a numerological lens tinged with theosophical underpinnings. Frank, "J. L. M. Lauweriks," 61.

146. Van Doesburg wrote, "The periodical *Windwijzer* ['weathercock'] . . . appears under the pseudonym *Wendingen*, which describes its contents perfectly (its motto 'you never can tell' or 'where the wind blows, there go I'). It is the Dutch continuation of the periodical *De Ring*, founded in Düsseldorf in 1908 and edited by the architect Lauweriks (a periodical which smelled strongly of Vienna and the Werkstätte)." Theo van Doesburg, "Rondblik" [At a glance], *De Stijl* 9, no. 6 (June 1921): 87. Quoted and translated in Richard Padovan, *Towards Universality: Le Corbusier, Mies and De Stijl* (London: Routledge, 2002), 134.

understanding of Van Doesburg's position specifically, and De Stijl's more generally, within the history of modernism to acknowledge the roots of their early decorative projects as a part of a modernist discourse long present within theories of ornament and design.

It must be remembered what was at stake for Van Doesburg in his protestation to Oud. His objections were not solely to defend his autonomous status as a painter and his possible devolution into "mere decorator." Rather, it was in maintenance of his position within a larger polemic on the nature of ornamentation in the modern built environment. Within the Netherlands, De Stijl emerged amid the reconfiguration of the national system of decorative arts education and the subsequent codification of a modern design pedagogy, disseminated through theoretical manuals on ornament and design. As the principal ideas of De Stijl aesthetics coalesced, the artists of the group—most notably Huszar and Van Doesburg—navigated through and responded to the prominent position this academic discourse held within the field of cultural production. Van Doesburg adopted a dialectical stance toward these theories of ornament and design permeating Dutch decorative arts. He sought to sublate the principles of invention, mathematics, and objectivity intrinsic to such theories into his program, while abandoning the emphasis on symmetry and the use of national signifiers that were popular among Nieuwe Kunst artists and their successors in the Amsterdam School. In rejecting the connotations of specific place, Van Doesburg, as well as Huszar, advocated the universal implementation of abstraction and asymmetry, two features theorized by the artists to be indelibly tied to modern existence. It was with this understanding that Van Doesburg endeavored to

produce ornamental designs that reflected the dynamic nature of the modern era, in order to better condition a modern, universal subject for such a tumultuous environment.

6 The Rhythm of Light: De Stijl and a Modern Stained Glass

When Van Doesburg staged a photograph in his studio in Weimar, Germany in February 1922 (fig. 6.1), the *De Stijl* editor had already been in the city for nearly a year. He had first traveled to Weimar at the invitation of the director of the Bauhaus, Walter Gropius (1883–1969), who wished to introduce the Dutch artist to the school and its curriculum.[1] From the moment of his arrival, Van Doesburg gleefully played the role of provocateur. He directed his critical ire toward the gap he perceived to exist between the decidedly modern vision of the Bauhaus, as described to him by Gropius, and the school's pedagogical program crafted by the instructor Johannes Itten (1888–1967).[2] Van Doesburg objected specifically to Itten's promotion of his idiosyncratic expressionist ideas, guided by esoteric principles derived from the mysticism of Mazdaznan.[3] Before his arrival in Weimar, Van Doesburg had already articulated his antagonism toward expressionist tendencies. In 1919, in the pages of *De Stijl*, he pejoratively labeled the

1. For a summary of Van Doesburg's time in Weimar see Gillian Naylor, *The Bauhaus Reassessed* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1985), 93–97. The accounts of Van Doesburg's arrival in Weimar vary. In the 1927 jubilee issue of *De Stijl*, he explicitly states that following his introduction to Gropius by Bruno Taut, he was then invited by the Bauhaus director to visit the school. See Theo van Doesburg, "Data en feiten (betreffende de invloedsontwikkeling van De Stijl in 't buitenland) die voor zich spreken" [Data and facts (concerning the influence of *De Stijl* abroad) that speak for themselves], *De Stijl* 7, no. 79–84 (1927): 54. Bruno Zevi, however, in his *Poetica dell'architettura neo-plastica* [Poetics of neoplastic architecture] (Milan: Editrice Politecnica Tamburini, 1953), published a letter from Gropius which stated that no such invitation was ever extended. See Baljeu, *Theo van Doesburg*, 41 (see chap. 1, n. 75).

2. Itten was the architect of the Bauhaus's *Vorkurs* (basic course). Leah Dickerman, "Bauhaus Fundamentals," in *Bauhaus: Workshops for Modernity, 1919–1933,* ed. Barry Bergdoll and Leah Dickerman (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2009), 15–17.

3. A late-nineteenth-century neo-Zoroastrian religious movement that emphasized personal development through breathing and vegetarianism.

movement as a "transitional art."[4] He argued that artists and designers affiliated with the movement remained tethered to the past, as they continued to rely on figuration and draw upon romantic ideals. Furthermore, he objected to the movement's promotion of an unbridled individualism, which ran counter to the collective needs of modern society.[5]

Van Doesburg set himself the task of reversing the Bauhaus's course by guiding the school's program toward a pedagogy rooted in rational, universalizing principles that aligned more closely with those of De Stijl aesthetics. He stated his goals directly in a letter to his friend, the poet Antony Kok:

> In Weimar I have turned everything radically upside down. This is supposed to be the most famous academy with the *most modern instructors*! Every evening I have spoken to the students there and spread the poison of the new spirit. Soon, *De Stijl* will reappear in a *more radical manner*. I have tremendous energy and know now that our views will prevail over everyone and everything!"[6]

Just five days later, he followed up this proclamation with a postcard illustrating his progress: a photograph of the Bauhaus's building with the words "De Stijl" repeated in ink over the façade (fig. 6.2).

Van Doesburg staged the studio photograph to portray himself as opposed to the Bauhaus's expressionist theoretical leanings at the time. He stands in the back corner of

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4. "Het expressionism is een overgangskunst." Theo van Doesburg, "Het Expressionisme," *De Stijl* 2, no. 12 (October 1919): 141.

5. Even in Kandinsky's abstract compositions, Van Doesburg claimed, Expressionism merely dissolved form rather than fundamentally deconstructing it, as was the case with cubism. Van Doesburg, "Het Expressionisme," 141–42.

6. "In Weimar heb ik alles radical ondersteboven gekeerd. Dat is de beroemdste academie, die nu *modernste leeraren*! Ik heb de schüler daar iedere avond gesproken en overal het vergif van den nieuwen geest rondgestrooid. De Stijl zal binnen kort opnieuw verschijnen *radicaler*. Ik heb bergen kracht en weet nu dat onze inzichten zullen overwinnen: Allen en Alles!" (emphasis in the

the studio holding a magazine. On his left is the writer and philosopher Harry Scheibe (1897–1979), fixated on something he is reading. To the artist's right sits his partner and collaborator Nelly van Moorsel (1899–1975), who is keenly listening to what he is reading aloud. Van Doesburg is dressed in a black shirt, white tie, and heavy jacket. His attire is that of the modern urban flâneur, an appearance antithetical to the smock of the romanticized and hermetic artist worn by the likes of Itten. In the foreground, on a sawhorse table, are rolls of paper, a pen and ink, and a letter stamp. The items are arranged to give an impression of focused work, broken only in order for Van Doesburg to share something he has just read with Van Moorsal. The magazine he holds is the Hungarian avant-garde journal, *MA* (Today), a like-minded publication with which the artist had forged a close, though brief, relationship at the time.[7] Finally, hanging directly behind Van Doesburg is his analytical cubist painting *Composition in Gray (Rag Time)* from 1919 (fig. 6.3). The monochromatic work is an ideological banner, demonstrating his allegiance to cubist aesthetics, rather than Itten's expressionist theories.

Conspicuously hanging on the far wall and propped up just below the window, however, are what seems anachronistic to Van Doesburg's articulated campaign of progressive aesthetics: a large design for, and a pair of, completed stained-glass windows.[8] The agent of this modern abstract aesthetic was working in the romantic

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original). Letter from Van Doesburg to Antony Kok, January 7, 1921. Reprinted in Ottevanger, *De Stijl overall absolute leiding*, 313 (see chap. 1, n. 16).

7. Michael White, "Mechano-Facture: Dada/Constructivism and the Bauhaus," in *Albers and Moholy-Nagy*: *From the Bauhaus to the New World*, ed. Achim Borchardt-Hume (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 80.

8. Although it is difficult to identify the stained-glass windows, it is very likely—judging from the composition of the leaded glass—that one of the works was a transom window for the Spangen district in Rotterdam. The paper mock-up on the far wall was part of a larger

medium, *tout court*. This dichotomy—between Van Doesburg's canonized position as avant-garde agitator and his engagement in the design of stained glass—has caused the artist's work in the medium to be marginalized in the literature on De Stijl. The peripheral positioning of stained glass has been reinforced by the lack of theoretical attention given to the subject in the pages of the group's journal. And yet, during the early years of De Stijl, stained glass made up a significant portion of Van Doesburg's artistic production. Nor was he alone among De Stijl members, as Van der Leck and Huszar created works in the medium as well. In spite of the prominence of stained glass among these De Stijl artists, there has yet to be a dedicated study that addresses the significance of the medium to the formation of the group's early theories.[9]

When these projects have been discussed, they have frequently been analyzed within the framework of painting.[10] Understanding De Stijl stained glass strictly through the prism of easel painting, however, has overlooked important characteristics of the medium, which this chapter will seek to address. To do so, De Stijl stained glass will first need to be recontextualized within a history of stained-glass production in the

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commission for stained-glass windows mentioned for the agricultural school in the small northern Dutch town of Drachten, discussed in previous chapters.

9. Only Evert van Straaten has written a dedicated essay on the topic. His discussion, while filled with insightful comments and observations on De Stijl stained glass, remained largely a survey rather than a critical investigation of the group's engagement with the medium. See Evert van Straaten, "De Stijl," in *Glas in Lood in Nederland, 1817–1968* [Stained glass in the Netherlands, 1817–1968], ed. Carine Hoogveld (The Hague: SDU, 1989), 94–107. In several publications, Nancy Troy has also developed critical insights into Van Doesburg's use of stained glass and its relationship to music: see Nancy Troy, "Theo van Doesburg: Music into Space," *Arts Magazine* 56, no. 2 (1982): 92–101; and *De Stijl Environment*, 23–25 (see chap. 2, n. 47). Her insights will provide the foundation for my own analysis of Van Doesburg's stained glass.

10. For example, Nancy Troy argued, "The stained-glass work of Theo van Doesburg and Vilmos Huszar, as well as that of [V]an der Leck, must be understood in the context of their easel paintings, in which these artists were attempting to achieve a monumental style. . . ." Troy, *De Stijl Environment*, 10.

Netherlands, and Europe more broadly, following the medium's revival during the nineteenth century. Once this diachronic history of stained glass is established, I will turn to synchronic discussion of the medium's significance to De Stijl artists.

Of the many meanings glass carried in the historiography of modernism, the material's associations with panoptic surveillance and hygienic sterility have garnered the majority of critical attention. Yet it was another history of glass, one rooted in transmutation and transformation, that appealed directly to Van Doesburg's own theoretical interests. The writings of Friedrich Nietzsche will play a significant role in my examination of the *De Stijl* editor's engagement with such metaphors, imbued in the crystalline materiality of stained-glass windows.

The Rise of Modern Stained Glass

De Stijl artists' involvement in stained-glass design occurred at the height of the medium's popularity in the Netherlands. After nearly two centuries of decline following the Protestant Reformation, the production of stained glass expanded dramatically over the course of the nineteenth century.[11] The rebirth of interest in stained glass coincided with the rise of Romanticism in both Northern Europe and Great Britain. The Romantic imaginary turned to the Middle Ages to fantasize a time more directly connected to the sensuous and metaphysical experience of life that existed before the rationalism of the Enlightenment. The numerous medieval ruins dotting the European landscape became sites to engage in the sublime sensation of the past age. The ability of medieval stained

11. Jasmine Allen, *Windows for the World: Nineteenth-Century Stained Glass and the International Exhibitions, 1851–1900* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018), 2. For a broad survey of the history of stained glass, see Virginia Chieffo Raguin, *Stained Glass: From Its Origins to the Present* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2003).

glass to produce atmospheric effects that lent to this experience of the sublime sparked a renewed interest in the medium. Horace Walpole (1717–97), for example, an enthusiast of Gothic, became one of the earliest collectors of historic stained glass. He desired to re-create the effect of Gothic architecture by installing his collection in his revivalist home, Strawberry Hill House (1749–76).[12]

Paralleling the Romantic interest in stained glass was the revival of Catholicism in Great Britain, which advanced the position of Gothic architecture. As discussed in chapter 3, Augustus W. N. Pugin became one of the most prominent advocates for the reintroduction of Gothic forms into architectural practice. He did so in decidedly religious terms, asserting that the return to such an architectural style would imbue modern, secular society with Catholic piousness and morality, which he believed was inherent in Gothic aesthetics.[13] Meanwhile, contemporaneously in France, the July Monarchy (1830–48) turned to the country's Catholic and medieval past in order to reconstitute a shared national culture and identity. This aim led to a major campaign to restore examples of medieval architecture damaged because of neglect, or during the French Revolution and subsequent Napoleonic Wars. The restoration of stained glass was

12. A. Charles Sewter, *The Stained Glass of William Morris and His Circle* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), 3–4.

13. Pugin's efforts coincided with the Oxford Movement's aim to reconcile the Church of England's articles of faith with the principles of the Catholic Church. Pugin also found support through the Cambridge Camden Society, founded in 1836. Through its publication *The Ecclesiologist*, the society was committed to the Catholic revival in all expressions, from theological to architectural. Martin Harrison, *Victorian Stained Glass* (London: Barrie and Jenkins, 1980), 20–21.

an essential aspect of these efforts, and received strong public support from neo-Gothic architects such as Eugène Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc.[14]

The popularity of Gothic architecture during the first half of the nineteenth century dramatically increased the demand for stained-glass windows, the production of which was enabled by a succession of technological discoveries in the making of glass. The firm Chance Brothers Ltd. at Smethwick was the first to begin producing cylinder sheet glass on a large scale, in 1832.[15] The industry was further propelled by efforts to analyze the chemical composition of medieval glass. In 1849, Charles Winston (1814–64)—a trained barrister and amateur scholar of stained-glass history—commissioned a chemist, in collaboration with the firm James Powell and Sons, to produce better quality glass derived from the study of medieval precedents.[16] The successful endeavor led to the discovery of improved formulas for colored glass. Advances in the quality of glass production, coupled with the increase in the number of architectural projects that incorporated stained glass into their designs, led to dramatic growth in the number of glass workshops both in Great Britain and Europe. The expansion of the stained-glass industry was put on full display for the first time in a modern context at the 1851 Great Exhibition in London. At the exhibition, twenty-seven British and more than twenty foreign stained-glass firms were represented. The wide range of windows was set into black frames placed at eye level, so visitors could view the quality of the windows up close. The exhibition space was darkened by a sheet of canvas hung from the ceiling. The

14. Virginia Chieffo Raguin, "Revivals, Revivalists, and Architectural Stained Glass," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 49, no. 3 (September 1990): 313–19.

15. Allen, *Windows for the World*, 2.

16. Harrison, *Victorian Stained Glass*, 22–23.

windows were illuminated from behind by natural light, enabled by the glass and iron engineering marvel that was the Crystal Palace itself (fig. 6.4).[17]

Concurrently in the Netherlands, a similar resurgence in the production of stained glass was underway.[18] It was sparked by Catholic emancipation in the county, which, although religious equality had been reestablished in 1795 under the Batavian Republic (1795–1806), truly only occurred with the restoration of the episcopal hierarchy in 1853. A proliferation in the construction of Catholic churches followed, with over 500 new churches built throughout the country in just fifty years.[19] One of the most important voices influencing the form and principles of Dutch Catholic architecture was the writer and theorist Joseph Alberdingk Thijm (1820–89). He was a crucial conduit for introducing to the Netherlands the ideas of international neo-Gothic theorists such as Pugin, the German antiquarian Sulpiz Boisserée (1783–1854), and the French architect Jean-Baptiste Lassus (1807–57). His seminal work *The Sacred Line* (1858) drew from these theorists and established a modern symbolic order for religious architecture to follow.[20]

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17. Jasmine Allen has written a compelling survey on the exhibition of stained glass at world's fairs throughout the nineteenth century. For a review of these exhibitions see Allen's chapter "A Multitude of Display," in *Windows for the World*, 44–82.

18. To date, the most definitive survey of modern Dutch stained glass remains Carine Hoogveld's *Glas in Lood in Nederland.* For a review of the history of Dutch stained glass before the nineteenth century, see Zsuzsanna van Ruyven-Zeman, *Stained Glass in the Netherlands before 1795, Part I: The North* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2011).

19. Bank and Van Buuren, *Bourgeois Culture,* 359 (see chap. 1, n. 5).

20. He dedicated his book to these three figures. He was also influenced by the writings of the German Catholic author August Reichensperger (1808–18) and the French art historian Adolphe Napoléon Didron (1806–67). See Arjen Looyenga, "How Roman Catholics Became Gothicists: The Gothic Revival in the Netherlands," in *Gothic Revival: Religion, Architecture and Style in Western Europe, 1815–1914*, ed. Jan de Maeyer and Luc Verpoest (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2000), 79.

Thijm's writings influenced a generation of Dutch architects, the most notable of whom was Pierre Cuypers. Following his training in architecture at the Academy of Fine Arts in Antwerp, Cuypers returned to the Netherlands and opened a studio in Roermond. Uniting Thijm's theories on architecture with those of Viollet-le-Duc, the Dutch architect sought to improve upon medieval precedent by grounding his architectural projects in geometric principles. He found the universality of mathematics to parallel his own Catholic belief in divine creation.[21] Cuypers was also well aware of the French architect's theoretical text "Stained Glass," published as the ninth and final volume of his important treatise *Dictionary of French Architecture from the 11th to 16th Century*.[22] In the volume, Viollet-le-Duc not only provided a guide to the various approaches to the medieval production of glass, but also established universal aesthetic principles through which the medium could be revived in the present day.[23] Cuypers's architectural projects, and their need for stained glass, were extensive—enough so that the glass workshop with which the architect collaborated in Roermond, founded by Frans Nicolas (1826–94), was propelled into exponential growth, becoming one of the largest stained-glass workshops in the country at that time.[24]

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21. Looyenga, "How Roman Catholics Became Gothicists," 79–81.

22. Eugène Emmanuel Viollet-Le-Duc, *Mediaeval Stained Glass*, trans. Francis Palmer Smith (Atlanta: Lullwater, 1946). (Originally published as "Vitrail," in *Dictionnaire raisonné de l'architecture française du XI^e^ au XVI^e^ siècle* [Paris: A. Morel, 1854–1868].)

23. In his discussions of methods of production, Viollet-le-Duc drew from the eleventh-century scholar Theophilus, who compiled Latin texts into a medieval craft manual for glass production entitled *De diversis artibus.* This was translated into French in 1843 by the historian Count Charles de l'Escalopier (1811–61). Allen, *Windows for the World*, 4. For a critical discussion of Viollet-le-Duc's theories on stained glass, see James R. Johnson, "The Stained-Glass Theories of Viollet-Le-Duc," *The Art Bulletin* 45, no. 2 (June 1963): 121–34.

24. Hoogveld, *Glas in Lood*, 34–36.

Thijm also held sway over a generation of artists whom he taught after his appointment as a professor of aesthetics and art history at the National Academy of Fine Art in Amsterdam in 1876.[25] His students, such as Richard Roland Holst and Antoon Derkinderen, combined Thijm's ideas on medieval stained glass with the growing popularity in the Netherlands of the socialist writings of Walter Crane and William Morris, which, as discussed in chapter 3, were translated and made widely available in the last decade of the nineteenth century. Stained glass resonated with these artists, who sought an ethical response to the encroachment of industrial production into art and design—a task they believed to be achievable only through the reinvigoration of craftsmanship and the collective model of the medieval guild. Stained glass's revival in the nineteenth century was perceived to reflect the revival of craftsmanship itself. The medium was insulated from industrial mass production, for the process—even at larger-scale operations—still mostly required glass to be blown, shaped, and cut by hand. Additionally, the tasks of painting, arranging, and leading the final composition for the window were conducted by skilled artisans. The entire endeavor required close collaboration between the designer, the glassblower, and the artisans who assembled the final window.[26] Finally, because of the medium's inherent relationship to architecture, it served as a bridge between craftsman and architect toward the collaborative creation of the built environment. Stained glass as an art form thus embodied the core ethical and social principles advocated by the Arts and Crafts movement.

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25. Hoogveld, *Glas in Lood*, 29.

26. This is not to say that stained-glass windows were not produced in mass quantities. At the height of demand in the 1920s, as will be discussed below, the process was standardized, and labor conditions were poor. See Hoogveld, *Glas in Lood*, 60.

It was primarily for this last-mentioned reason that Derkinderen, for example, embraced the medium, and sought to expand it beyond its typical ecclesiastical setting and into secular spaces. He received his first commission in 1893, to produce allegorical stained-glass windows for the hall of the University of Utrecht (fig. 6.5). Rather than merely producing the cartoon for the window, to be executed by the glass workshop, the artist endeavored to involve himself in all aspects of the manufacturing process. Toward this end, he spent several months learning various techniques at the Sodencamp glass workshop in Jutphaas, a village near Utrecht, where his windows were made.[27] In 1899, Berlage approached Derkinderen to produce stained-glass windows for the assembly hall of the Chamber of Commerce in the Amsterdam Stock Exchange building—a paradigm in its own right of the collaborative efforts of *gemeenschapskunst*. In preparation for the commission, the artist opened his own studio in Laren, called De Zonnenbloem (The Sunflower), in 1903.[28] Inspired by Ruskin's Guild of St. George, he modeled his workshop on medieval examples.[29] Following the successful completion of the monumental windows for the Stock Exchange building, Derkinderen's studio struggled financially, closing in 1906.[30] His promotion to Director of the National Academy in 1907 constrained his creation of stained glass, but led to the advancement of the medium within the program's curriculum. Derkinderen's work was deeply influential on a

27. Hoogveld, *Glas in Lood*, 230–31.

28. For a review of the commission see Bank and Van Buuren, *Bourgeois Culture*, 172–78.

29. He took on several apprentices, the most important of whom was Frits Geuer (1879–1961), the son of an important stained-glass manufacturer.

30. Hoogveld, *Glas in Lood*, 230. For further discussion of the spread of these ideas through the Netherlands see Lieske Tibbe, "Theory Versus Practice: The Influence of Socialist Ideals on the Decorative Arts Movement in The Netherlands," in Reyer, *Industry and Design in The Netherlands,* 35–36 (see chap. 1, n. 15).

younger generation of artists training in the decorative arts—most notably Bart Van der Leck.

Bart van der Leck: *The Mining Business*

From a young age, Van der Leck was involved with stained glass. In 1891, as a teenager, he entered a stained-glass workshop in Utrecht as an assistant.[31] In that role, he would have been well aware of the installation of Derkinderen's stained-glass windows for the University of Utrecht. The work itself had an enormous impact on the young artist. Following nearly seven years in this vocational work, Van der Leck traveled to Amsterdam to receive formal training in the fine and applied arts at the Quellinus School and the National Academy for Fine Arts. After completing his studies, he was offered a grant to open his own stained-glass workshop. He declined the funds, however, instead choosing to pursue other artistic endeavors.[32] But his work from this period reveals his strong interest in Derkinderen's particular style of neo-Gothic aesthetics. An excellent example is his illustrations made for the book *The Song of Solomon* (1905; fig. 6.6), for which his friend P. J. C. Klaarhamer designed the typography. The elongated bodies and Byzantine folds recall those of the allegorical figures in Derkinderen's windows in Utrecht.[33] He remained connected with the elder artist's work and traveled to Laren for a

31. Cees Hilhorst, "Bart van der Leck," in Blotkamp, *Formative Years,* 154 (see chap. 3, n. 1).

32. Hilhorst, "Bart van der Leck," 154.

33. Van der Leck, drawing upon the symbolist work of Jan Toorop (1858–1928), attenuated and abstracted his figures in *The Song of Solomon* to a greater degree. Clifford Ackley, *Holland on Paper: In the Age of Art Nouveau* (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, 2014), 226.

brief period in an attempt to work at De Zonnenbloem, only to arrive at the moment of the workshop's financial dissolution.[34]

As discussed in chapter 4 and 5, in the years that followed his brief stint in Laren, Van der Leck pursued other avenues to bring a monumental decorative program to the modern interior. Instead of stained glass, he began experimenting with painting on Eternit fiber-cement board, a process that mimicked the effect of painting directly on the wall. The use of Eternit—free of the expense and logistical complexity involved in the production of stained-glass windows—likely enabled Van der Leck to experiment with his ideas on the monumental interior with greater ease. It was also during this period that he began to move away from the elongated neo-Gothic figures in the style of Derkinderen and toward more geometric forms influenced by images of Egyptian wall painting. Nevertheless, in 1914, when he received a commission to design a monumental stained-glass window from his new patrons Anton and Helene Kröller-Müller, he took the opportunity to return to his initial vocation.[35] The window was intended for a stairwell in the offices of the family's shipping firm, Müller and Company, located in the Hague.[36] Around the time he received the commission, and in the years which followed, Van der Leck completed a number of projects for the company. These works, including *Work at the Docks* (1916; fig. 5.12), frequently depicted scenes inspired by the shipping industry and the workers who labored to maintain it. In the poster he designed to advertise the

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34. White, *De Stijl and Dutch Modernism,* 19 (see chap. 1, n. 25). Van der Leck also likely would have been drawn to Derkinderen's workshop by his assistant Geuer, who was a member of the Genootschap Kunstliefde (Art Lovers' Association) in Utrecht, to which Van der Leck had belonged. Hoogveld, *Glas in Lood,* 242.

35. H. P. Bremmer, the art dealer and consultant, who had a contract with and represented Van der Leck, recommended the artist to the Kröller-Müllers in 1913, and transferred his contract to the couple in 1914. Hilhorst, "Bart van der Leck," 159–60.

Batavier Line—a cargo and passenger line from Rotterdam to London managed by Müller and Company—he included a vignette of dockworkers opposite that of wealthy passengers, setting both on an equal footing (1916; fig. 6.7). His attentiveness to the status of the working class stemmed directly from Van der Leck's socialist sympathies, which were shared among his generation of artists who embraced the ideals of *gemeenschapskunst*.[37]

Van der Leck continued to express his interest in the subject of modern labor in his stained-glass window commission for Müller and Company's mining operations in North Africa and Spain. For *The Mining Business* (1914–15; fig. 6.8), he traveled to the mines owned by the company. There he produced a number of sketches for the project. In the final window, executed in his Egyptianesque style, Van der Leck represented all stages of the company's business. *The Mining Business* was organized in a grid consisting of three rows with five panels each.[38] In the four corners of the composition Van der Leck depicted miners strenuously laboring underground to extract the ore. In the eight outer vignettes between the corner scenes are various depictions of workers above ground processing the coal, as well as the heavy machinery and draft animals that aided

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36. Troy, *De Stijl Environment*, 11.

37. This continued the artist's interest in subjects of labor. He depicted factory workers leaving a cotton mill in Glanerburg in 1910, and soldiers stationed near Amersfoort from 1911–12. See Hilhorst, "Bart van der Leck," 155–57.

38. White, *De Stijl and Dutch Modernism*, 15–17. Religious allusions have been read into the triptych format of the window. The religious underpinnings of the triptych format in Van der Leck's work have been studied by Carel Blotkamp: see "Triptieken in Stijl," reproduced in *Bart van der Leck*, ed. Toos van Kooten (Otterlo: Kröller-Müller Museum, 1994), 153–63. When one considers Van der Leck's training, however, the window's format appears to be less an allusion to Christian symbolism and more a pentimento of Christian forms in the tradition of stained-glass design.

in the extraction process. In the central panel are four company administrators, hunched over, arduously documenting the operations represented in the panels around them.

As Michael White noted, the theme of *The Mining Business* likely drew from a source that would certainly have been familiar to Van der Leck: Roland Holst's mural *Industry* (1903; fig. 5.15, p. 190), located in Berlage's Amsterdam Stock Exchange.[39] The mural shows a pair of steelworkers above a pair of miners—two industries vital to the expanding Dutch economy. Both pairs of figures toil under terrible conditions. Yet unlike the overtly socialist polemics of *Industry*, Van der Leck approached his design in a more idealistic way. His workers are depicted with dignity, albeit through a veil of abstraction that masks the realities of the industry. Additionally, as White has convincingly argued, rather than arrange his window in a composition in which the company's management is on top and the miners and laborers below, Van der Leck arranged his composition centripetally. With this nonhierarchical arrangement, Van der Leck emphasized the company employees' collaborative nature, reinforcing their sameness instead of their difference.[40] The idealism of *The Mining Business*, and Van der Leck's project generally, was at odds with the polemical nature of Roland Holst's mural. It was this ideological divide that led the De Stijl collaborator away from representations of class oppression and social despair, and toward an interest in alleviating such suffering through the transformation of the modern built environment itself—a project in which he found more success through his painting and interior design. *The Mining Business* would be the last work Van der Leck produced in stained glass. As Evert van Straaten observed, the commission proved to be more the conclusion of a phase—one tied to the tradition of

39. White, *De Stijl and Dutch Modernism*, 17–18.

craft revival—than the beginning of a new avenue upon which to explore monumental design.[41]

Color or Light? Huszar's Work in Stained Glass

In 1916, the year in which Van der Leck completed and installed *The Mining Business*, Vilmos Huszar also began designing stained-glass windows. Although aware of Van der Leck's work, Huszar likely began his experimentations with stained glass independent of his future De Stijl collaborator.[42] His training as an interior decorator at the School for Applied Art in Budapest would have exposed him to the medium. This predisposition to stained glass was likely further reinforced by Huszar's membership in the Hague Art Circle (Haagsche Kunstkring). He had enrolled in the organization's "architecture and applied arts" section.[43] Within this subsection of the organization, he met fellow members such as Johannes Willem Gips (1869–1924), who owned a stained-glass workshop in The Hague.[44] Gips's workshop was essential in the production of Huszar's own work in 1916. A collaborative relationship was forged between the workshop, Huszar, and, as will be discussed later, Van Doesburg. As Sjaral Ex has suggested, the assistance the workshop provided to these De Stijl artists was repaid through advertisements later placed in the first volume of *De Stijl* (fig. 6.9).[45]

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40. White, *De Stijl and Dutch Modernism*, 15.
41. Van Straaten, "De Stijl," 96.
42. Hoek and Ex, *Vilmos Huszar*, 29 (see chap. 1, n. 26).
43. Sjarel Ex, "Huszar," in Blotkamp, *Formative Years*, 87.
44. Hoogveld, *Glas in Lood*, 247.
45. Ex, "Huszar," 87.

Nearly all of Huszar's stained-glass windows from 1916 are now lost, but black-and-white photographs remain of all the known works produced during this year. These windows were a creative fulcrum in Huszar's early artistic career. The first window Huszar designed was probably *Composition (motif sunflowers)*. The only remaining documentation of the window is a reproduction in Van Doesburg's *New Movement in Painting* (1917; fig. 6.10).[46] The work was thematically related to his previous work in oil on canvas such as *Vincent* (1915; fig. 6.11) or *Painting (yellow)* (1916).[47] In these early paintings, Huszar fused a post-impressionist palette with futurist and cubist forms into richly colored and dynamic compositions. *Composition (motif sunflowers)*, however, differs from these works in a significant way. Huszar limited the complexity of the composition. Importantly, he mirrored the two flower motifs across the diagonal of the window in order to create a loosely symmetrical pattern.

This shift in practice, I argue, was stimulated by modern domestic stained glass. These windows were ubiquitously installed in the homes of the many industrializing cities in the Netherlands, such as The Hague, Rotterdam, and Amsterdam. The explosion in popularity of these stained-glass windows coincided with the expansion of middle-class housing for a rapidly growing petit-bourgeois populace in these cities.[48] In order to make such homes appear more luxurious, and thus marketable, stained-glass windows

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46. Ex, "Huszar," 87.

47. The latter work is lost, likely destroyed during World War II. A photographic reproduction was included in Ex, "Huszar," 85.

48. The first wave of housing construction occurred during the last decade of the nineteenth and the opening years of the twentieth centuries. A second wave of construction occurred in the years following World War I. See Laura Roscam Abbing, "Stained Glass in Dutch Homes from 1880 to 1940," in *Le vitrail dans la demeure des origines à nos jours: Vitrer et orner la fenêtre. Actes du XXVIII^e colloque international du Corpus Vitrearum, Troyes 4-8 juillet 2016* (Ghent: Snoek, 2018), 51–52.

were commonly installed in places visible to the public. The use of stained glass was further popularized by a discourse on hygiene which called for greater light to be allowed into the home.[49] Stained or frosted glass proved a perfect medium to permit light into homes, obviating the need for heavy curtains while retaining a sense of privacy.

A number of new workshops were founded to meet the surge in demand for stained glass. Many of these workshops, particularly in The Hague, were started by artisans who worked at the famous and influential stained-glass workshop ’t Prinsenhof, founded in Delft in 1891 by Jan Schouten (1852–1937).[50] To facilitate the large quantity of orders, workshops produced sample or model books for their clientele, enabling them to create designs from a standardized set of motifs, forms, and finishes, priced by the square meter.[51] These model books relied upon grammars of ornament—discussed at length in chapter 5—to create basic patterns that the client could choose to elaborate (fig. 6.12). With more specialized orders, once a pattern was decided upon, the type of glass—whether transparent, opaque, or figured—as well as its color could be selected.[52] Huszar would have followed this process in configuring *Composition (motif sunflowers).* The window’s loose rotational symmetry recalls the compositional strategies found in such grammars of ornament, which frequently informed domestic stained-glass window design. Huszar’s use of symmetrical patterning in this window departed from the formal strategies he had used in earlier paintings like *Vincent*.[53]

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49. Hoogveld, *Glas in Lood*, 56.

50. Gips was one such artisan. Hoogveld, *Glas in Lood*, 309–10.

51. Hoogveld, *Glas in Lood*, 56–59.

52. Hoogveld, *Glas in Lood*, 59–60.

53. This departure in compositional strategy also lends credence to the argument that this work was likely the first of his windows designed in 1916. Ex, “Huszar,” 87.

The two windows that followed *Composition (motif sunflowers)* moved away from this strategy of symmetry and focused instead on figurative designs. In *Girl* (1916; fig. 6.13), for example, Huszar created a simplified, abstract composition of a girl's silhouette.[54] Fortunately, a reproduction of the preliminary study for the window still exists (fig. 6.14). In the drawing, a girl is shown from the waist up with her head turned slightly down as she looks ahead. Superimposed over the naturalistic depiction of the girl is a matrix of orthogonal lines which map the surface of the drawing. This linear network is significant because it visualizes how the material properties of stained-glass windows—panes of glass secured in a grid of lead cames—affected Huszar's formal decisions. Thinking through the logic of stained glass, he abstracted his figure according to the inherent linearity of the window's leading, generating an abstracted composition rooted in geometric form.

Huszar continued this formal strategy in a window installed in the nursery of his own home in Voorburg.[55] The subject of *The Family* (1916; fig. 6.15) responded directly to the space in which it was installed. In a probable self-portrait, Huszar depicted a bearded father standing tall, hands crossed in front of his chest. Below him, possibly seated, is the figure of a mother embracing a kneeling child, who looks up to her with raised arms. A photograph colored with crayon gives an impression of the possible appearance of the original work (fig. 6.16). Uncolored glass was used for the flesh tones, while yellow panes were employed to distinguish the figures' hair and bodies. Blue panes of glass were also used to color the bodies, as well as the father's eyes. The background

54. Sjarel Ex has suggested that the surviving documentary photograph is likely of the cartoon for a final window, rather than a completed window. For such a cartoon to be made, however, suggests that a final window was likely executed. Ex, "Huszar," 87.

was then created from a pattern of green, purple, and blue. As with *Girl*, Huszar abstracted a subject according to the logic of the grid established by the window's lead cames. While scholars have insisted that these geometric figures were the result of a short-lived, divergent branch within Huszar's broader artistic evolution, such a position devalues the significance of the aesthetic shift these works in glass initiated within Huszar's own oeuvre.[56] It can be argued, for example, that the rectangular forms in *The Family* set the aesthetic precedent for his design of the logo for *De Stijl* and other works that follow. The *De Stijl* logo morphologically echoes the figures in *The Family*. Its forms are predicated on a visual operation that recalls stained-glass windows, in which the juxtaposition of transparency and opacity creates legible form.

Huszar's home was located in the same Voorburg neighborhood as that of the wood manufacturer, Cornelis Bruynzeel Jr. Motivated by contemporary concerns about domestic hygiene, Bruynzeel looked to bring greater light into his home, Villa Arendshoeve. As part of a broad renovation effort, he decided to install a stained-glass skylight above the main stairwell in the residence (fig. 6.17).[57] He awarded Huszar the commission for the project in the summer of 1916. The task was enormous, particularly for a relative neophyte. The window was more than two by three meters in size. The scale of the project required the artist to adapt his designs to the reinforced-iron support beams, which were arranged in two Y-shaped configurations and buttressed by rows of parallel beams. Nevertheless, in a letter to artist and friend Chris Beekman (1887–1964), he

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55. Ex and Hoek, *Vilmos Huszar*, 29.

56. Sjarel Ex has written, "While the stained glass shows a rather independent development, namely the abstraction of natural subject into adjoining geometric forms, the paintings [of this period] seem to be a direct response to Bart van der Leck's work." Ex, "Huszar," 90.

57. Troy, *De Stijl Environment*, 36.

reveled in the challenge. He wrote, "It has been my ideal to create such a work and now I can test it with all my strength." He continued, "I literally fill the entire work in *glass* as *color* and *lead* as *line*."[58]

The imagery in the window is difficult to decipher because of the monochromatic nature of the photograph, as well as the refracted architectural features visible through the glass panes along all four sides of the skylight. Nevertheless, upon close inspection a symmetrical pattern—mirrored axially across the center of the composition—can be made out. Huszar's return to the symmetrical patterning he had experimented with in *Composition (motif sunflowers)* was united with the semiabstract, geometric style developed in *Girl* and *The Family*. In the six large panels at the center of the skylight there are two pairs of kneeling figures. There is another possible group of four figures—which look sphynx-like in form—visible in the panels just outside this central group, and facing outward in opposite directions. This collection of figures, all placed at the edge of the window, would have created an undulating outer ring of colored glass. This boundary of colored glass rhythmically frames the center of the skylight, which comprised a cruciform collection of uncolored glass. Huszar's skylight thus employed a clever compositional strategy, introducing a decorative program while maximizing the amount of light allowed into the stairwell.

The large skylight was not installed at Villa Arendshoeve until 1917, a year after Huszar completed his initial designs.[59] The success of the project sparked a productive

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58. "'t Is mijjn ideal geweest om zoo een werk te krijgen en nu kan ik met al mijn kracht daaraan proeven. . . . Ik vul de hele werk letterlijk in n.l. *glas* als *kleur* en *lood* als *lijn*." From a letter dated August 16, 1916. Reproduced in Ex and Hoek, *Vilmos Huszar*, 29.

59. Troy, *De Stijl Environment,* 36.

relationship between the artist and Bruynzeel which brought Huszar increasingly into the realm of interior design. In 1918, he oversaw the design and installation of a display stand for Bruynzeel's parquet flooring factory at the Jaarbeurs (National Trade Exhibition) in Utrecht.[60] This commission was followed by several interior color schemes the next year. The best known, and most widely promoted, design was for the bedroom of Bruynzeel's two boys at Villa Arendshoeve, discussed at length in chapter 4. The growing number of commissions for large-scale interior design projects coincided with Huszar's waning concentration on stained glass. This movement away from the medium, however, was not driven solely by the consuming demands of these projects. It was also propelled by a theoretical shift in the artist's thinking on stained glass—although one likely spurred by the experience of these commissions. Huszar's evolving ideas on the place of stained-glass windows in the modern built environment was discussed in an interview the artist had with the critic Ro van Oven. Her summary and analysis of their conversation was published in 1919 as an article in *Levende Kunst,* entitled "Modern Stained-Glass Painting in Holland."[61] The revealing article traverses a variety of topics, from Huszar's engagement with the color theories of Ostwald to the usefulness of stained glass as a replacement for curtains in the home. What is of particular note, however, is the dramatic reversal Van Oven describes in Huszar's position on stained glass. By the time of their interview, the artist had come to view stained glass as an "outdated material."[62] Huszar elaborated his position, stating that future architecture would be

60. Ex and Hoek, *Vilmos Huszar*, 55.

61. Ro van Oven, "Moderne Glasschilderkunst in Holland," *Levende Kunst* 3 (June 1919): 48–57.

62. "Thans immers acht hij, in verband met de komende bouwkunst en waarin geometrische strengheid alles, wat in de verte op sentiment gelijkt overboord werpt, het glas-in-lood een verouderd material." Van Oven, "Moderne Glasschilderkunst in Holland," 54.

rooted in geometric rigor and monochromatic façades, and that these trends would be disturbed by the sentimentality of the colored compositions of stained-glass windows. He insisted that windows in modern architecture should consist purely of uncolored glass.[63]

His changing thoughts on the role of stained glass in the interior are visible in a color scheme Huszar based on Bruynzeel's skylight and the stairwell underneath. The drawing, *Spatial Color Composition for a Stairwell* (1919; fig. 6.18), was created after the skylight was installed, and around the time he began working on the color scheme for the children's bedroom in the same home. While only a black-and-white reproduction of the work remains, it nevertheless provides insight into his changing focus on the interior. In *Spatial Color Composition for a Stairwell*, Huszar applied color planes to the floors, ceilings, walls, and doors in an approach identical to that used in the children's bedroom. Importantly, in this detailed rendering of the stairwell the stained-glass skylight has been left unadorned. Now, in the drawing, the window is composed of unleaded sheets of clear glass. *Spatial Color Composition for a Stairwell* undercuts Huszar's stated premise for his argument for the use of uncolored sheet glass: as one motivated out of deference to the concerns of the architect and the architectural façade.

More likely motivating Huszar's newly articulated position toward the use of stained glass was his increased focus on the application of color to the interior. In the boys' bedroom, for example, Huszar's scheme was based on a complex system of tonal

63. "Glas-in-lood is te zuiveraesthetisch en waar de modernste architecten alle aesthetische kwesties willen uitschakelen, zich alleen willen storen aan de utiliteit, alleen met organisch materiaal zullen werken, wordt iedere overbodige versiering verbannen en zal alleen het effen, volkomen doorzichtige spiegelglas een plaats vinden." Van Oven, "Moderne Glasschilderkunst in Holland," 54. Troy has emphasized that the debate about the decorative emerged in this discussion particularly with regard to windows. Huszar attributes the "decorative" to objects that

balancing that implemented Ostwald's mathematically based color theories. The intrusion of colored light through stained-glass windows, he thought, would complicate the process of achieving this harmonious relationship between colors in this scheme. By shifting to uncolored glass, he sought to eliminate this variable altogether. For Huszar, the most effective strategy for the chromatic transformation of the interior was strictly through the application of color to the interior, and the intrusion of colored light from stained glass would only detract from this effort. He made this point explicit when describing the Bruynzeel bedroom, writing: "Color is divided *light*, and if it is balanced the total impression is light. What the pointillists saw in nature, I have here attempted to do with planes, which are logically deduced from the plastic form. Thus light can be plasticized in the interior."[64]

The windows he designed for the bedroom—curiously left out of all the published images of the room—were located on the wall just before the small niche with the wash area (fig. 6.19). While punctuated by interspersed panes of colored glass, the windows predominantly comprise uncolored glass. The simplified geometric pattern recalls the work of Frank Lloyd Wright (fig. 6.20) or Charles Rennie Mackintosh more than Huszar's work from 1916.[65] The overwhelming effect of the windows is the emanation of

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fail to meet the rational, masculinized rigor of his scientific theories—what he would later categorize as *gestemheid.* See chapter 3 above.

64. "Kleur is verdeeld *licht* en als 't evenwichtig is, moet de totale indruk licht geven. Wat de pointillisten in de natuur gezien hebben, heb ik getracht hier te doen met de vlakken, die logisch uit de plastische vormen herleid zijn. Heirdoor kan het licht in 't interieur gebeeld worden." Huszar, "Over de moderne toegepaste kunsten," 75–76.

65. For a review of Frank Lloyd Wright's work in stained glass, see Julie Sloan, *Light Screens: The Complete Leaded-Glass Windows of Frank Lloyd Wright* (New York: Rizzoli, 2001) and Thomas Heinz, *Frank Lloyd Wright: Glass Art* (West Sussex: Wiley, 1994). On Mackintosh, see Roger Billcliffe, *Charles Rennie Mackintosh: The Complete Furniture, Furniture Drawings, and Interior Designs* (New York: Abrams, 2010).

mostly white light into the room. Huszar included uncolored glass in additional projects, including a collaboration with Piet Zwart on an interior design (fig. 6.21). The windows depicted in the invented space anticipate a window that Huszar would create in 1921—a rare example of a still extant window by the artist (fig. 6.22). The window, like those in the Zwart collaboration, is composed solely of uncolored panes of glass. But while the window's panes are uncolored, they are not made entirely of clear, transparent glass. Instead, Huszar used varying degrees of textured cathedral glass. His use of this type of glass—created by rapidly cooling glass rolled out flat on a metal surface by machine—allowed him to produce a dynamic composition which aligned with his articulated positions on the medium.[66] The light that did pass through the window would be refracted through the textured glass, creating an interesting play of light which still preserved the carefully balanced color of the room.

First Light: Van Doesburg's Early Stained-Glass Windows

In the closing days of 1916, Van Doesburg traveled from Leiden, where he was living, to The Hague in order to meet Huszar. The two artists had become acquainted a few months earlier, and often discussed their shared aesthetic views.[67] They were visiting the Kröller-Müller collection on display at the family's company headquarters on Lange Voorhout—not far from the Binnenhof.[68] They met with a purpose, to see the most recent works by

66. Sloan, *Light Screens*, 18.

67. Van Doesburg had met Huszar through the art association, De Anderen (The Others), he had founded in March 1916 with friend and fellow artist, Erich Wichman. Several works of Huszar's were included in the organization's inaugural exhibition in May of that year. Van Doesburg acquired his Hungarian counterpart's *Painting (yellow)*, mentioned above. Blotkamp, "Theo van Doesburg," in *Formative Years*, 10–11.

67. Janssen and White, *The Story of De Stijl,* 38 (see chap. 1, n. 4).

Van der Leck. What they found was two of the artist's most important early monumental works—both of which had emerged from his recent travels to North Africa. The first was the aforementioned stained-glass window, *The Mining Business,* and the other, the large abstract triptych *Composition 1916 No. 4* (fig. 5.26) Viewing the monumental works sequentially—one in glass and the other on canvas—affirmed the two artists' beliefs on the integration of modern forms into the built environment. While Huszar would be propelled toward the application of only abstract fields of color within the interior—a position which, as discussed above, led to the phasing out of color in his experiments in glass—Van Doesburg would be drawn to a different theorization of stained glass in the interior which explicitly embraced the role of color.

By the time of their visit to the Kröller-Müller collection, Van Doesburg was in the midst of designing his first commissioned stained-glass window (1916; fig. 6.23). He was given the opportunity by another recent acquaintance, the architect J. J. P. Oud, with whom he had formed the Leiden Art Club: The Sphinx in June of 1916.[69] The following month, Oud began designing an official residence for the mayor of Broek in Waterland, a village north of Amsterdam, and asked Van Doesburg to create a window for the back door of the home.[70] The only condition placed on the commission was that it include the town coat of arms: a swan holding a bundle of arrows. Van Doesburg wrote excitedly to his friend Antony Kok in August, "I have my first commission from that architect, but I

69. Blotkamp, "Theo van Doesburg," 12. Van Straaten aptly described the blossoming of the two men's personal and intellectual friendship, writing: "They spoke of uniting the arts 'in a single, common, spiritual emotion,' stating that there should be no rivalry among artists, undoubtedly inspired by the instinctive knowledge that each thought his own discipline the most important." Van Straaten, *Theo van Doesburg*, 26 (see chap. 3, n. 61).

70. Taverne et al., *Poetic Functionalist*, 124–26 (see chap. 3, n. 148).

still have to master the technique."[71] His admitted lack of familiarity with the medium is telling. It suggests that this commission likely instigated the artist's engagement with stained glass.

Van Doesburg relied on the input of Willem Bogtman (1882–1955), the artisan he employed to execute his design.[72] In a letter written to Oud in November, Van Doesburg conveyed his inexperience with the process of stained-glass design and manufacture. Notably he displayed a lack of understanding of the structural demands of leaded glass windows, which necessitated a visit to Bogtman for clarification:

> I am busy working on the window for you. Of course, the swan will have to be supported more or less as in the accompanying sketch. The background cannot be cut from one piece of glass, which would not be strong enough. I shall try to integrate the joins in the motif as far as possible, so that they are less noticeable. Before doing the definitive drawing, I shall go and see Bogtman to find out how much freedom I have.[73]

Bogtman's expertise would have been invaluable for the novice to stained glass. He emerged as a prominent theorist of the decorative arts, and his workshop, founded in 1912, had become a leader in the execution of modern stained glass, particularly for projects by the Amsterdam School. At the time Van Doesburg began working with Bogtman, his workshop had recently produced the large-scale skylight for the

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71. "Ik heb mijn eersten opdracht van dien architect, doch moet mij de techniek nog eigen maken." Letter from Van Doesburg to Kok, August 4, 1916. Reprinted in Ottevanger, *De Stijl overall absolute leiding*, 161 (see n. 6 above).

72. Van Doesburg likely selected Bogtman's workshop to execute his designs because of proximity. The artist was living in Haarlem at the time of the commission.

73. Letter from Van Doesburg to Oud, November 16, 1916. Quoted in Van Straaten, *Theo van Doesburg*, 26.

Scheepvaarthuis (1915; fig. 6.24), the important Amsterdam School building designed Joan van der Mey (1878–1949), Michel de Klerk, and Piet Kramer.[74]

Drawing from his consultations with Bogtman, Van Doesburg embraced the material restrictions of stained glass. His final design placed the coat of arms in the center of the composition, surrounded by an abstract field of colored geometric forms. Out of necessity he abandoned his attempt to create this field from a single, presumably painted, piece of glass.[75] Instead, he embraced the linearity of the lead cames, finding a homology between them and the contours of his own abstract works in paint. The composition of swirling panes of yellow, orange, green, and red glass surrounded by an undulating border of blue are evocative of his paintings from earlier in the year, such as *Composition I (Still Life)* (fig. 6.25).

In addition, Van Doesburg's earliest stained-glass compositions drew upon the precedent set by Huszar.[76] During his initial forays into stained-glass design, Van Doesburg sought advice from Huszar, who, as discussed above, had been engrossed in the medium since the start of 1916. The correspondence between the two artists reveals that Huszar provided useful suggestions on glass selection, among other tasks specific to the medium.[77] His influence is visible in many of Van Doesburg's projects. For example, Van Doesburg's work *Stained-Glass Composition (Female Head)* (1917; fig. 6.26) was

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74. Hoogveld, *Glas in Lood*, 77–79, 212.

75. In a letter from Van Doesburg to Oud dated September 11, 1916, the artist notes his pleasure with the composition comprised of "sections of glass" that did not have to "resort to painting." See Van Straaten, *Theo van Doesburg*, 27.

76. His work shares a strong similarity to the format of the latter artist's *Painting (Yellow)*, which the former had recently acquired. See n. 1 above.

77. Van Straaten, *Theo van Doesburg*, 26–27.

directly influenced by Huszar's earlier stained-glass window *Girl*.[78] The technical and aesthetic dialog shared between the two on stained glass at the end of 1916 continued when Van Doesburg received an additional commission for the mayoral residence in Broek in Waterland (fig. 6.27). He was asked to produce four stained-glass panels for a transom window above the door in which his first window was installed. For this design, Evert van Straaten has suggested, Van Doesburg used the motif of a semireclined figure set on a sharp diagonal.[79] The way in which Van Doesburg abstracted his figure is evocative of Huszar's strategies in stained glass: using geometric forms to create a simplified rendering of the subject. This is most evident in his use of four contiguous, vertically oriented, rectangular panes of glass to represent a figure's hand—a formal device frequently employed by Huszar. But while the transom window for the mayoral residence retains vestiges of Huszar's approach to abstraction, and stained-glass design specifically, what also becomes apparent is a divergence between the two artists' approaches. In this project Van Doesburg departed from the stasis of Huszar's work from 1916. The reclining figural motif creates a strong diagonal thrust downward, employing cascading yellow and red rectangular and semicircular forms. In the adjacent window, Van Doesburg mirrors the entire composition, reversing the direction of the diagonal. The result is a series of four abstract windows that move the eye in accordance with the direction of each diagonal pull. This sense of zig-zagging movement became crucially important to Van Doesburg, propelling and sustaining his aesthetic and his theoretical interest in stained-glass work well beyond that of Huszar.

78. Ex and Hoek, *Vilmos Huszar*, 26.

79. Van Straaten, *Theo van Doesburg*, 27.

Dance, Dance, Dance: Van Doesburg and a Motif

While working on the stained-glass window for the mayoral residence of Broek in Waterland, Van Doesburg was further investigating the means by which to convey a sense of visual dynamism in his work. A drawing from this period illustrates the artist's concurrent and overlapping interests (fig. 6.27). A sketch of the Broek in Waterland coat of arms intended for his first commissioned window is visible in the lower left corner of the drawing. The diminutive pencil sketch is overshadowed, though, by two larger abstract figures drawn in ink. These were two of at least a dozen sketches derived from Van Doesburg's study of a sculpture of the Indian deity Krishna (fig. 6.28).[80] The artist's initial sketch of the sculpture depicts the figure of Krishna with legs crossed and arms lifted, holding what would have been a flute—possibly missing from the source sculpture, as it was excluded from the drawing. In a progressive series of several drawings, Van Doesburg abstracted the figure from two distinct views: from both the front and behind. Guiding this process of abstraction is a network of superimposed lines. A single vertical line bisects the figure to establish vertical symmetry. He also employed additional oblique lines to guide the placing of forms in a manner that created a dynamic contrast to the stability of the bisecting vertical line. Using this linear structure, Van Doesburg arrived at two final abstract sketches composed entirely of geometric shapes. The first, depicting the figure from behind, appears near the far right of a long, horizontal sheet containing six studies, as seen in figure 6.29. The second, a frontal view, is located in figure 6.27—the sheet with the Broek in Waterland coat of arms.

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80. It is uncertain where Van Doesburg may have come across the sculpture, or whether it was an authentic artifact or a reproduction.

These two figures were then translated into a painting, *Dancers* (1916; fig. 6.30), which was presented as a diptych. In each panel, the forms comprising the abstract figures spin around a central organizing pole. This sense of dynamic rotation is reinforced by Van Doesburg's alternation of black and gold on each side of this vertical axis, so that a black form is always paired with an opposite in gold.[81] The rotational effect of each figure is emphasized by its respective placement within a static, white field. Setting the two figures in a diptych format adds a temporal element to the composition. The implied movement, though, is not merely that of the figure dancing across the divide of each panel, but of the viewer's position as well. The difference in colors at the bases of the figures—switched in the adjacent panels—conveys the change in the viewer's perspective. The figure on the left is seen from behind, while that on the right is viewed from the front.

It is important to note that *Dancers* was not an ordinary painting. Rather, Van Doesburg chose to explore the themes of dance and movement in casein or oil on Eternit. As discussed above, this material was being used contemporaneously by Van der Leck to create a denser, more matte surface. His aim was to establish a homology between the surface of his easel paintings and that of the wall. Van Doesburg's use here of Eternit was a rare occurrence. Only one additional example of a work using the support remains from this period: the small painting he made after one of the abstract patterns in the

81. As will be discussed in the following chapter, this strategy of pairing oppositional colors to imbue a sense of movement appears in Van Doesburg's collaborative effort with Jan Wils on the latter's design of furniture for the hotel-café, De Dubbele Sleutel.

monumental tile floor of De Vonk (fig. 5.44, p. 209).[82] Van Doesburg's use of these materials is thus important. That the only other occasion he chose to use Eternit as the support for a painting was a project linked to a decorative program within an architectural setting suggests that Van Doesburg conceived of the *Dancers* in relation to the built environment.

This formative link between painted material and architectural setting is given further credence by Van Doesburg's decision to employ the motif of abstract dancing figures in a pair of stained-glass windows the following year. The two windows were conceived as an interrelated pair. For *Dance I* (fig. 6.31), he based the composition on the front-facing view of the figure—the motif in the right panel of *Dancers*—while using the other view for its companion, *Dance II* (fig. 6.32). With the pair of stained-glass windows, Van Doesburg departed from the composition of the two abstract figures from *Dancers*. In *Dance I* and *Dance II*, he chose instead to follow a structural device that mirrored and inverted each figure across the center of the composition. Carel Blotkamp observed that the windows marked the first introduction of this formal strategy in Van Doesburg's work.[83] He would immediately employ it for the transom windows at the mayoral residence in the Broek in Waterland. And, as discussed in the previous chapter, the formal strategy would continue to serve as the foundation for many of his early experiments in patterning. The symmetrical inversion of the figures in both works is echoed by a similar dynamic in the colors of glass selected for the windows. In *Dance I*, the composition comprises panes of glass in primary colors, while *Dance II* is set in

82. A possible third example identified in the *Oeuvre Catalog*—an abstract composition with a black background—may have employed Eternit. The work, however, is now lost. See Hoek, *Theo van Doesburg*, 194 (see chap. 3, n. 89).

contrast with its companion work by the use of glass in secondary colors.[84] Juxtaposing primary and secondary colors communicates the interconnectedness of the works, while allowing both stained-glass windows to retain their independence. This formal device marked another innovation that would become a common practice in his later work—a monumental example of which, as discussed in chapters 5, were his color schemes for the Drachten projects.

Because these two stained-glass windows are derived from *Dancers*, small-scale, and seemingly self-contained, scholars frequently cite the content of the windows and avoid discussion of the works in the context of which they were conceived.[85] As discussed above, however, the windows' connection to *Dancers* indicates that Van Doesburg's exploration of the motif was done with the idea of architectural space in mind. This point is echoed by a review of the stained-glass windows in the pages of the *Holland Express*: "The dancers (in stained glass) from [Van Doesburg] are gaudy and rather whimsical . . . , inspired by the courtesan. Let us keep the wenches out of our *house*—don't let the light of God that falls through our windows be filtered and colored by things of a lower nature."[86] Setting aside the pejorative critique by the unidentified

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83. Blotkamp, "Theo van Doesburg," 14.

84. The glass used in *Dance I* consisted of a rich blue; deep, though less transparent red; a subtle yellow; and translucent, uncolored glass; as well as four pieces of green glass included in the border. For *Dance II*, Van Doesburg selected glass in a nearly opaque purple, in more transparent forest green and pumpkin orange, and a light yellow similar to that in *Dance I*.

85. Evert van Straaten, for example, omits these stained-glass works from his study of Van Doesburg's projects that relate to architecture. Meanwhile Allan Doig, rather than discuss the works in the context of their potential position within architecture, explored the composition's sculptural origins, focusing on its cubist aesthetics. Doig, *Theo van Doesburg*, 84–85 (see chap. 1, n. 14).

86. Emphasis mine. "De dansen (in glas in lood) van denzelfden kunstenaar [zijn] bont en grillig-druk . . . , geïnspireerd door de courtisane. Laat ons de deernen uit ons huis houden—laat niet het licht Gods dat onze vensters binnenvalt, gefilterd en gekleurd worden door dingen van lageren

author, what is of note is that the reviewer understood *Dance I* and *Dance II* as situated within the home. This is further supported by the manner in which Van Doesburg installed stained-glass windows of similar small scale in his studio. A photograph of the artist, dating from around 1917, shows him seated at a desk next to a large window from which light pours into the room (fig. 6.33). In the upper register of the window, cut off by the edge of the photograph and somewhat faint, are two small stained-glass windows. The photograph further demonstrates that Van Doesburg would have considered these works not merely pictorially, but existing within an architectural setting.

When understood in such a way, these windows lend further credence to Nancy Troy's observation that the dance motif was fundamentally linked with Van Doesburg's interest in interior design. Troy—who first brought critical attention to the recurrence of the motif of dance in the works of De Stijl artists—stressed the theoretical importance of movement to Van Doesburg's work, and the challenge of achieving such a sensation:[87]

> Van Doesburg must have been aware of the inherent contradiction involved in his attempt to convey a sense of movement within the limitations of a static medium such as easel painting. Indeed, it was precisely this contradiction that he subsequently sought to overcome by locating painting in the domain of architecture, thus encouraging the viewer to move in response to the organization of colors disposed around him in the built environment. . . . The abstract image of

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aard." Quoted in Hoek, *Theo van Doesburg*, 175. (Originally published as "Toonstelling van kunstnijverheid, Academie aan de Coolvest, Rotterdam," *Holland Express* 11, no. 18 [May 1918]: 319–22).

87. Nancy Troy, "Figures of the Dance in De Stijl," *The Art Bulletin* 66, no. 4 (December 1984): 645–56. For example, the following year, Van Doesburg became fascinated with the performance of Russian folk dancers. He proceeded to make a series of studies of a dancing figure, using a similar superimposed structure of vertical and oblique linear elements to structure the abstraction of the image. The group of studies resulted in the composition *Rhythm of a Russian Dance* (1918). Around the same time, he also produced several drawings and eventually a painting based on the tarantella, an Italian folk dance.

> the dance enclosed in a purely aesthetic realm was merged here with the "performance" or movement of real people in actual space and time.[88]

Overlooked in this concise observation, though, is the theoretical nexus that unified the artist's interest in the motif of dance, the metaphors of movement it conveyed, and its place within the experience of the modern built interior, one which, I wish to argue, rested squarely in Van Doesburg's interest in Friedrich Nietzsche.

The Dionysian and Dance

As discussed in chapter 2, Van Doesburg, like many artists of his generation, had read and been profoundly influenced by Nietzsche. For the philosopher, dance functioned as a crucial device in his philosophical praxis, particularly in his early texts, *The Birth of Tragedy* and *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Deriding the German intellectualization of Western culture under nineteenth-century positivism and scientific thought, he argued that these distinctly modern phenomena conditioned a compulsion in society for systems of empirical analysis and calculation to mediate how one understands the nature of human experience. In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche compared the overextension of logic in modern society with the death of Greek tragedy at the hands of Euripides.[89] By introducing the explanatory prologue to the genre, he said, Euripides had evacuated tragedy of the unknown, and of the vital tension brought about by narrative ambiguity.[90] In divesting tragedy of its dramatic uncertainty through the intervention of narration and

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88. Troy, "Figures of the Dance," 648–49.

89. Douglas Burnham and Martin Jesinghausen, *Nietzsche's* The Birth of Tragedy*: A Reader's Guide* (London: Continuum, 2010), 12.

90. Friedrich Nietzsche, "The Birth of Tragedy," in *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, trans. Walter Kaufman. (New York: Modern Library, 2000), 81–86.

logic—an act Nietzsche linked to the rise of Socratic thought—Euripides, the philosopher argued, had stripped tragedy of its Dionysian essence.

Nietzsche further faulted the tragedies of Euripides for addressing the audience as individuated spectators. Such preemptive narration subverted the power of the chorus in pre-Euripidean tragedy. The chorus had been the key agent in involving the audience as an active participant that engaged in the events on the stage in an eruption of Dionysian collectivity.[91] Nietzsche diagnosed the modern condition as plagued by the same kind of alienation and individualism, enacted by Socratic logic and linguistic difference, that had spelled the death of tragedy. As Elaine Miller summarized:

> Drama in the time of ancient Greece, Nietzsche observes, existed to bring people together to linger, just as it brought the plastic, poetic, and musical arts together into a meaningful whole. The modern world separates art experiences into categories: theater, concert, museum, poetry reading. Modern drama rushes toward a resolution in a purposive narrative, and when the play is over, the spectators, who did not know each other to begin with, stream out of the theater, each to his or her own separate life, without so much as reflecting upon the collective experience they have shared: "The Greeks saw the old tragedy *in order* to gather together; the German of his own volition leaves [the drama] in order to disperse."[92]

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91. "If, as has already been argued, the chorus evokes a feeling of oneness, then we cannot completely separate the *Greek* chorus from the *Greek* audience. The members of the audience see themselves as changed 'as by magic' into satyrs. . . . And so the chorus *is* the ideal spectator insofar as it, and the audience which identifies with it, is the beholder of the visionary world of the scene." Thomas Leddy, "Nietzsche on Unity of Style," *Historical Reflections/Réflexions Historiques* 21, no. 3 (Fall 1995): 559–60. See also Adrian Del Caro, "The Birth of Tragedy," in *A Companion to Friedrich Nietzsche: Life and Works*, ed. Paul Bishop (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2012), 58.

92. Elaine Miller, "Harnessing Dionysus: Nietzsche on Rhythm, Time, and Restraint," *Journal of Nietzsche Studies* 17 (Spring 1999): 7.

Nietzsche, however, pointed to a fundamental tool in the dissolution of alienation brought about by the logocentrism of Euripidean tragedy and the stultifying cultural effect of modern positivism: music.

Music—at least certain kinds of nonoperatic music—according to Nietzsche, operates at a prelinguistic, communal level capable of immediate and unmediated communication.[93] Free of the symbolic burdens of language, it allows for a more direct encounter with the "thing itself" and the true nature of reality.[94] Importantly, the immediacy of music and its capacity to bring an individual closer to true reality empowers its ecstatic resonance. Music's Dionysian nature, Nietzsche argued, imbues it with a distinctly affective capacity to alter perception and thought. In doing so, it could serve as the art form par excellence for facilitating a subject's self-transformation: "Has it been noticed that music liberates the spirit? Gives wings to thought? That one becomes more of a philosopher the more one becomes a musician?—The gray sky of abstraction rent as if by lightning; the light strong enough to grasp; the world surveyed as from a mountain. . . . And unexpectedly answers drop into my lap, a little hail of ice and wisdom, of *solved* problems."[95]

Music enables one to think musically—a testament literalized in the lyrical style in which he wrote *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Yet Nietzsche emphasized that musical thought is not conducted through reason and in words. Rather, musical thought operates beyond the mind, affecting the entire body. He wrote, "Thinking wants to be learned as

93. Kathleen Higgins, "Nietzsche on Music," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 47, no. 4 (October–December 1986): 664.

94. Bruce Benson, "Nietzsche's Musical Askesis for Resisting Decadence," *Journal of Nietzsche Studies* 34 (Autumn 2007): 30.

dancing wants to be learned, *as* a kind of dancing."[96] To access the truth revealed by the liberating effects of music, Nietzsche argued, one must dance. The importance of dance rests in its ability to bring the body, through music, in accord with the primal unity. Nietzsche used the term to describe a state in which the complete deindividualization of the self is achieved, allowing for the revival of connections with the communal nature of humanity.[97]

It is important to note that music and dance extend *into* the environment, forming and shaping it through movement and rhythm. As Kathleen Higgins argues:

> The external environment, furthermore, is perceived as being simultaneously conditioned by the music. The music organizes time in a way that is experienced in common by all who hear it. Although the individual's body occupies a space separate from the space occupied by others, this separation is disregarded through the dance, which celebrates the possibility of moving continually from one place to another. Dancing coordinates the experience of traversing space from the separate vantages of different individuals into a unified configuration in motion through time. The Dionysian experience is like the dancer's response to music because it draws the individual into a common experience with others and because it moves one into a joyous response that involves the entire person.[98]

Thus Nietzsche felt it important to emphasize the therapeutic and transcendent qualities of dance. He wrote that "even long before there were philosophers, one acknowledged music to have the power to discharge the emotions, to cleanse the soul, to soothe the

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95. Friedrich Nietzsche, "The Case of Wagner," in *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, 614.

96. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of Idols*, trans. Richard Polt (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997), 48.

97. "In song and in dance man expresses himself as a member of a higher community; he has forgotten how to walk and speak and is on the way toward flying into the air, dancing." Nietzsche, "The Birth of Tragedy," 37.

98. Higgins, "Nietzsche on Music," 670.

ferocia animi—and indeed precisely through its rhythmic quality. When one had lost the proper tension and harmony of the soul, one had to *dance* to the beat of the singer—that was the prescription of this healing art."[99] For Nietzsche, then, the praxis of dance enabled the abstract nature of music to be transferred into the corporeality of the human being. In doing so, it fostered the dissolution of the subject into a collective whole through movement. Dance altered a participant's perception, rousing it from stasis and complacency to a dynamic and active enterprise. For Nietzsche, dance and music thus became essential aspects of a meaningful life (culture). As a result, they would function as important metaphors for those artists who followed his thought to instantiate a transformative experience by which to awaken the decadent European to a new, modern sensibility.

Music and The Villa Allegonda

If we use a Nietzschean lens to understand Van Doesburg's use of dancing as a motif, his attraction to a statue of Krishna comes becomes clear. The image of Krishna that captured the artist's attention, as Peg de Lamater observed, was that which evoked "the image/event of the *mandala*, the circular dance performed by Krishna and the *gopis* (milkmaids) where the god stands at the center of the ring, providing music for the dancers, but simultaneously also takes part in the dance. . . ."[100] As discussed above, dance and music were intrinsically linked, the latter being the progenitor of the former. This dependent relationship between the two led Van Doesburg to embrace music as a

99. Nietzsche, *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*, 84 (see chap. 1, n. 44).

100. Peg de Lamater's identification of the sculptural source of these drawings as a representation of Krishna was a correction to Nancy Troy's attribution of the model sculpture as a Javanese

metaphor to link his work with his broader theoretical views on art.[101] His consolidating thoughts on the musical and the visual arts were applied directly to his work in stained-glass design. For example, a series of sketches from 1916—discussed in chapter 5—illustrate his early musical inclinations in stained glass (fig. 5.16). The sketches were completed around the time of his studies for *Dancers*, and follow a similar process of abstraction. Van Doesburg deconstructed the laboring figures into simplified motifs composed of geometric forms, which could be repeated to create a pattern. As mentioned previously, the artist associated the rhythm of the pattern created by the repeated and interlocking motifs directly with music, as well as the sensation of dance. At the bottom of one of the sheets, he made this explicit by writing "the *beat*" next to a diagram of the overall structure of the pattern he sought to create.

As Van Doesburg progressed beyond these initial experiments into large-scale stained-glass designs, he employed music metaphorically to articulate the effect he desired with his windows. He used musical rhetoric when discussing his first monumental stained-glass commission for Villa Allegonda, the beachside residence of the Rotterdam businessman J. E. R. Trousselot (fig. 6.34).[102] Trousselot had recently

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dancer. See Peg de Lamater, "Van Doesburg, *Dance,* and Krishna," *The Art Bulletin* 68, no. 1 (March 1986): 154.

101. Like so many artists of his generation, he viewed music as more advanced than visual art. The synesthetic description of the relationship between art and music in Wassily Kandinsky's *Concerning the Spirituality in Art* (1912) left an impression on Van Doesburg. In a brief note to Antony Kok from 1915, he declared, "Remember: do not continue without Does and Kandinsky!" ["Denk er dat: niet verder gaan, zonder Does en Kandinsky!"]. Letter from Van Doesburg to Kok, May 31, 1915, reprinted in Ottevanger, *De Stijl overall absolute leiding*, 78. He followed this note the following week with a long theoretical meditation on music, explaining to Kok the nature of melody and rhythm, as well as the "pure spirituality" of music. Ottevanger, *De Stijl overall absolute leiding*, 78–82.

102. In 1918 Oud published a summary of the project: J. J. P. Oud, "Verbouwing Huize 'Allegonda' Katwijk aan zee" [Remodeling Villa Allegonda Katwijk aan zee], *Bouwkundig Weekblad* 39, no. 5 (February 2, 1918): 29–30.

purchased the building and contacted the painter Menso Kamerlingh Onnes (1860–1925) to remodel the residence. Kamerlingh Onnes modeled the home on North African architectural examples.[103] He reached out to Oud, a friend of his son's, to oversee the technical logistics of the project. Oud subsequently recommended that Van Doesburg be brought on to design two stained-glass windows: *Composition II* and *Composition V* (figs. 6.35, 6.36). The two windows were executed by the recently founded workshop N. V. Crabeth (1916–23); both, however, were lost following the remodeling of the building in the 1950s.[104] Van Doesburg wrote to Kok ecstatically about *Composition II*, noting, "I feel indescribably happy in the certainty of the visual arts. . . . I had completed the large 2.25 × .75 [meter] window. . . . There was, as it were, a rhythm throbbing with an unspeakable tension. When Dee came to see it on Sunday he immediately understood my treatment of the motif. He said that I had done with planes what Beethoven did with sounds. I thought that was a good remark. . . ."[105]

Only a black-and-white photograph of *Composition II* exists. A description of the window provided by the architect, Alfred Roth (1903–98), however, mentioned that it was colored with red, blue, yellow and uncolored pieces of glass.[106] The composition was likely based on the image of a seated figure, which was abstracted and subjected to Van

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103. Van Straaten, *Theo van Doesburg*, 28.

104. Hoogveld, *Glas in Lood*, 69.

105. "Ik voel mij onbeschrijfelijk gelukkig in de zekerheid der beeldende kunst. . . . Ik had het groote raam 2.25 × 77 voltooid. . . . Er dreunde als 't ware, een rhythme door van onzegbare spanning. Toen Dee zondag kwam om het te zien zag hij dadelijk hoe ik het motief verwerkt had. Hij zei dat ik met vlakken deed wat Beethoven deed met klanken. Dat vond ik een goede opmerking. . . ." Letter from Van Doesburg to Kok, May 3, 1917. Reprinted in Ottevanger, *De Stijl overall absolute leiding*, 185. "Dee" referred to J. Dee, a friend of Van Doesburg who latter assisted in the administration of *De Stijl.* Van Straaten, *Theo van Doesburg*, 31.

106. Van Straaten, *Theo van Doesburg*, 29.

Doesburg's process of patterning.[107] The mirroring and inversion used to create the window's composition produced an undulating, helical structure. Two parallel bands of geometric forms begin in the upper left and center of the window, and curve back and forth across the composition until they end in the lower center and right. This flowing collection of colored glass is countered by a movement of uncolored panes. Beginning in the upper right, the band of horizontally oriented, uncolored panes descend along a curve in the opposite direction, ending in the lower left corner of the window. The uncolored glass pattern functions as a countermovement to the two parallel bands of colored forms.

The undulating structure of *Composition II* created by the bands of colored and uncolored panes of glass was described in an article Oud published in *Bouwkundig Weekblad*—although it was likely written by Van Doesburg himself—on Van Doesburg's stained-glass windows.[108] "In *Composition II* the motif is deconstructed and transformed, and also assimilated in the space, in the white light, so that the aesthetic idea which underpins the work—'the rhythmic, ascending movement of the surf'—is depicted through nothing but relationships, without damaging the concept of the window as a translucent barrier."[109] The use of the word "rhythmic" in the description of the work's undulating linear composition was not arbitrary. It links the work to Van Doesburg's

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107. Van Straaten suggests that the motif was derived from an image Van Doesburg created of a seated girl knitting, as she looks upon a harbor; the work is now in the Centraal Museum. See Van Straaten, *Theo van Doesburg*, 28. Blotkamp, meanwhile, argued that a different seated figure was the source of the motif, pointing to a series of drawings Van Doesburg completed of a seated nude. See Blotkamp, "Van Doesburg," 15.

108. Van Straaten, *Theo van Doesburg,* 30.

109. "In Compositie II is het motief zoodanig door- en omgebeeld en mede in de ruimte, het witte licht, verwerkt, dat de esthetische idee, die aan het werk ten grondslag ligt, de 'rythmisch opgaande beweging der zeebranding' zich beeldt door niets dan verhouding, zonder dat het begrip raam, licht-doorlatende afsluiting, er onder lijdt." J. J. P. Oud, "Glas-in-lood van Theo van Doesburg," *Bouwkundig Weekblad* 39, no. 35 (August 31, 1918): 202.

early thoughts on the relationship between music and form discussed in a letter sent to Kok in the summer of 1915. In it Van Doesburg wrote that he had conceived music "as a rolling line."[110] He illustrated this with an undulating line not unlike those that structured his stained-glass window. He accompanied this with a further diagram discussing the nature of rhythm in music, tying the concept to that of movement in the visual arts (fig. 6.37a). Again, visualizing the concept through two linear elements—one irregular and the other a regular zigzag pattern (fig. 6.37b)—he wrote, "Pure rhythm in line is regular movement. Just look at the lines that I made here. The first is a line in movement without pure rhythm, the second line is a line in regular motion."[111]

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110. The complete accompanying text reads, "Reeds zeer jong, als veertienjarige jongen had ik het woord muziek oogenblikkelijk op mijn eigen manier opgevat. Bij muziek dacht ik aan een glooiende lijn." Letter from Van Doesburg to Kok, June 7, 1915. Reprinted in Ottevanger, *De Stijl overall absolute leiding,* 79.

111. "Zie maar eens naar de lijnen die ik hier maak. De eerste is een lijn in beweging zonder zuiver rhythme, de tweede lijn is een lijn in regelmatige beweging." Letter from Van Doesburg to Kok, June 7, 1915. Reprinted in Ottevanger, *De Stijl overall absolute leiding,* 79. Van Doesburg's understanding of rhythm was antithetical to tone. As he wrote in a letter to Kok: "The aim of v. D. [the composer Jakob van Domselaer (1890–1960)] is to construct an aesthetic whole with pure sounds. He began with Bach. I think it is a good thing for music and painting to encounter one another in the same principle. That principle is actually rather simple. It is always expressed too overarchingly but can be summarized as follow: the painters of the past tried to express their emotions in *tone*, as had been done by music before. That is why the term 'tone' is derived from music. In terms of painting, tone has led to painting with dirt. This was called sentimental art. In music it has led to oversentimentality. Just as no color could be discerned in the first case, the sound was lost in the latter. That means: *in both the painting and music of the 19th century* (the end of this century), sentiment destroyed the expressive means! The luminists restored the expressive means. They brought back color. . . . Schönberg did the same in music. He restored the expressive means. The modern painters of today try to express their emotion = their aesthetic emotion—by color-relationship" [Het doel van v. D. is met zuivere klanken een aesthetisch geheel op te bouwen. Hij is van Bach uitgegaan. Ik vind het goed wanneer de muziek en de schilderkunst elkaâr in hetzelfden beginsel ontmoeten. Dat beginsel is feitelijk doodeenvoudig. Het is altijd te omslagtig gezegd, doch kan als volgt worden samengevat: De schilders van voorheen trachten hunne ontroering uit te drukken door *toon*. Dit had de muziek al voor hen gedaan. Daarom is de term 'toon' aan de muziek ontleend. Toon is, in betrekking tot schilderkunst heeft dit geleid tot het schilderen met vuil. Dit werd sentimentskunst genoemd. In de muziek heeft dit geleid tot een oversentimentaliteit. Zooals in het eerste geval geen kleur meer te bekennen was, zoo ging in het tweede geval de klank verloren. Dat beteekent: in *de schilderkunst zoowel als in de muziek der 19e eeuw* (einde dezer euuw) ging het

Van Doesburg understood rhythm much as Nietzsche did—as a principle that imbued the abstract forms of music and dance, and thus life, with an ordering structure. For Nietzsche, George Leiner wrote, "There must be a rhythm, a rhyme, a meter to the lives of those who would overcome themselves."[112] As a device of "pure rhythm," Van Doesburg intended the curvilinear superstructure of *Composition II* to establish such an organizing framework for life. Furthermore, employing the idea of rhythm aided his efforts to differentiate his practice in stained glass theoretically from the work of other contemporary artists. The polemics driving Van Doesburg's musical metaphors is hinted at in the conclusion of the *Bouwkunding Weekblad* article: "[Van Doesburg's] technique is purely *musical*. The fact that he has succeeded in opening up new avenues for the representation of the stained-glass window, not on the basis of meter manufacture, but on a purely aesthetic basis, can also be considered important for modern architecture."[113] The explicit evocation of "meter manufacture"—meaning the typical process of ordering stained-glass windows by the square meter—was intended to distance his work from the more domestic, and pejoratively "decorative," stained-glass windows ubiquitous in recently constructed Dutch buildings and homes. His insistence on connecting his window designs to the pure rhythm and abstraction of music was also intended to distance himself from his contemporaries working in stained glass. This included artists

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uitdrukkingsmiddel aan het sentiment te gronde! De luministen brachten de herstelling van het uitdrukkingsmiddel. Ze brachten weer kleur. Schönberg deed hetzelfde in de muziek. Hij herstelde het uitdrukkingsmiddel. De moderne schilders van heden trachten hunne ontroering = hun aesthetische ontroering—uit te drukken door kleur-verhouding." Letter from Van Doesburg to Kok, May 3, 1917. Reprinted in Ottevanger, *De Stijl overall absolute leiding,* 184.

112. George Leiner, "To Overcome One's Self: Nietzsche, Bizet and Wagner," *Journal of Nietzsche Studies*, no. 9/10 (Spring/Autumn 1995): 135.

113. "Zijn techniek is de zuiver *musivische*. Dat het hem niettegenstaande dat gelukt is nieuwe wegen te openen voor de uitbeelding van het glas-in-loodram, niet op den grondslag van

such as Jacoba van Heemskerck (1876–1923), who, influenced by the work of Mondrian and the circle around *Der Sturm*, produced brightly colored, expressionist windows (fig. 6.38).[114] Van Doesburg's emphasis on a such musical resonance within his works also would have further separated him from Jaap Gidding (1887–1955), a friend of Oud's, who had translated his own unique form of abstraction, derived from Indonesian examples, into Art Deco stained-glass windows (fig. 6.39).[115]

The Rhythm of Light: Van Doesburg and Nietzsche

As he was working on his windows for Villa Allegonda, Van Doesburg began another project for the interior of the De Lange house (discussed in chapters 4 and 5). Along with providing designs for a frieze, interior color schemes, and a carved newel post, the artist was also commissioned to design a monumental stained glass for the residence, *Composition IV* (1917; fig. 6.40). As with the Villa Allegonda, the large-scale window would be placed in a stairwell (fig. 6.41). Moreover, Van Doesburg employed a strategy of mirroring and inversion similar to that in *Composition II*. Now, however, the window was divided into three separated vertical columns. The outer two columns of stained glass—executed in blue, yellow, red, and uncolored cathedral glass—are mirror images of one another. The two exterior windows frame the interior window, completed in a "countermovement" of secondary colors—panes of green, purple, orange, and uncolored

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meterfabricage, doch op zuiver esthetischen basis, is ook voor de modern architectuur van belang te achten." Oud, "Glas-in-lood van Theo van Doesburg," 202.

114. For a review of Van Heemskerk's oeuvre, see A. H. Huussen and Jaqueline van Paaschen–Louwerse, *Jacoba van Heemskerck van Beest, 1876–1923: Schilderes uit roeping* (Zwolle, Netherlands: Waanders, 2005).

115. For a broader discussion of Gidding's work see Meinke Simon Thomas, Elly Adriaansz, and Sandra van Dijk, *Jaap Gidding: Art deco in Nederland* (Rotterdam: Museum Boijmans van Beuningen, 2006).

cathedral glass. With *Composition IV*, Carel Blotkamp observed, Van Doesburg abandoned all lingering vestiges of the underlying figural motifs with which he had structured his compositions in previous windows.[116]

Around the time *Composition IV* was completed, Van Doesburg articulated his thoughts on his progression toward greater abstraction through metaphors of music and dance:

> There is still in my work a considerable shortcoming, which I fortunately realize myself. Once I have found a motif, I keep it too much together in the process. In music, particularly by Bach, the motif is constantly worked through in different ways. I would like to achieve that also, now with a new Dance motif. I feel dance to be the most dynamic expression of life, and therefore the most important subject for pure visual art.[117]

In this decidedly Nietzschean declaration, Van Doesburg acknowledged the need to move beyond representation to create visually a "dynamic expression" equivalent to that of dance itself. His vision of such an abstract visual language, as noted by Troy above, was of an art form that not merely implied movement, but instigated a compulsion towards actual movement—akin to a dance—in a subject experiencing his works.

Stained-glass windows, and their relationship to architectural space, could cast a rhythm by which the subject moved through and experienced the built environment. To advance this aim, Van Doesburg took advantage of the placement of his windows, many

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116. Blotkamp, "Theo van Doesburg," 16.

117. "Toch heb ik nog een groote leemte in mijn werk, die ik gelukkig zelf voel. Wanneer ik eenmaal 'n motief heb houd ik dit in de verwerking te veel bijelkaar. In de muziek, vooral bij Bach, wordt het motief voordurend op andere wijze verwerkt. Dat wil ik nu ook bereiken met een nieuw Dans motief. Ik voel den dans als de meest dynamische uitdrukking van het leven en daarom voor zuiver beeldende kunst als het belangrijkste onderwerp." Letter from Van Doesburg to Kok, July 14, 1917, reprinted in Ottevanger, *De Stijl overall absolute leiding,* 198.

of which were installed at liminal sites within buildings. For example, in Villa Allegonda and the De Lange house, his monumental windows were commissioned for stairwells, where they were rarely encountered head-on as a stationary tableau. Nor did they command a fixed position for viewing, because of the movement a stairwell encouraged. While a subject in either residence could pause for a moment and view the composition, this would only be a temporary event, punctuating the transition from one floor to the next. Rather, the experience of either *Composition II* or *Composition IV* in situ would have been one in and of *movement*, as the subject either ascended or descended the flight of stairs. Each step would provide a different vantage point from which to view and experience these works. Acknowledging the context in which these windows were installed enables us to grasp the significance of Van Doesburg's claim about his *Composition II* as being a "rhythmic, ascending movement." This was not merely a formal description. Rather, it also indicated a literal movement performed by the subject traversing the stairwell.

The use of stained-glass windows entailed yet a further participatory element, as the subjects themselves would have left a fleeting "trace" of their movement reflected on the surface of the composition. The materiality of the glass in these windows creates a complex visual experience of overlaid views: the outside world partially visible through the window, the window itself, and the reflected presence of the subject looking at the window from within. The multiplicity of views would be simultaneously registered on the surface of the window. Thus the subject, in his or her progression through space,

would be drawn onto the "stage" of the window, which mediated fragments of exterior and interior worlds through the rhythmic geometric panes of colored glass.[118]

Van Doesburg also installed many of his designs for transom windows above the entrance portals to buildings. He did so, for example, at the mayoral residence in Broek in Waterland; with *Composition VIII* and *Composition IX*, installed above the apartment doors of Spangen blocks 1 and 5 (figs. 5.52a, 5.52b); and at the Agricultural School in Drachten. These windows were situated at the thresholds of these buildings. At this boundary between interior and exterior, the properties of glass played a critical role. Illuminated by the light without, these windows would flood the typically darker spaces of the foyers with the light emanating from the windows' composition. This is the case with Van Doesburg's stained-glass window *Small Pastoral* (1921–22; fig. 6.42)—the transom window for the Agricultural School, which remains in place. The composition consists of eight geometric figures in two horizontal bands. From sowing to reaping, each figure performs a task related to agriculture. As light passes through the window, the figures are projected into the space, falling on the adjacent wall as if on a screen (fig. 6.43). As the day passes, and the sun moves across the sky, different figures in the composition come in and out of focus in the space. The feathered texture of the otherwise

118. The experience of the simultaneity of viewing through/at a window was captured contemporaneously by Robert Delaunay (1885–1941) in his series of abstracted paintings of windows. In particular, Gordon Hughes has analyzed Delaunay's *Simultaneous Windows (1st Part, 2nd motif, 1st Replica)* (1912) in his discussion of the painter's work in reconstructing the processes by which vision operates and is learned. Among the views of the Eiffel Tower seen through the window and the refracted colors caused by the glass, he identifies the *reflection* of a figure in the composition. The inclusion of the figure—functionally a portrait of the artist and avatar of the viewer—acknowledges the complexity of visual effects and their appeal to modernist artists at the opening of the twentieth century. See Gordon Hughes, "Envisioning Abstraction: The Simultaneity of Robert Delaunay's 'First Disk,'" *The Art Bulletin* 89, no. 2 (June 2007): 314. For in-depth discussion of Van Doesburg's interest in perception, see chapter 6.

clear glass gives a sense of materiality to the light.[119] The effect is a compositional projection constantly in flux. It is a state of motion shared with the subjects moving through this space, as they experience the window as an entirely different event depending on the moment in which they pass through the space. The result is an aesthetic event that stimulates and reinforces a more rhythmic act of temporal and embodied perception within the built environment.[120]

When discussing the design for his window *Large Pastoral* (fig. 6.44)—the second monumental stained-glass window he designed for the Agricultural School—Van Doesburg addressed rhythmic motion. A preparatory drawing for the window's agricultural motifs shows that they were developed from the early sketches of laboring figures, discussed above, with which Van Doesburg had first explored patterning and metaphors of music in his interior designs (fig. 6.45). He noted in a letter to C. R. De Boer:

> A stained-glass window with a purely modern solution remains primarily a *window*, with the contrast: color. A stained-glass composition is therefore a rhythmically broken window or, more accurately, a rhythmically broken *field of light*, that through color represents rhythm and *harmony*. In such a window the concept of architecture is most purely realized.[121]

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119. See Robert Sowers's chapter "The Texture of Light," in *The Language of Stained Glass* (Forest Grove, OR: Timber Press, 1981), 58–75.

120. The projective quality of these stained-glass works would certainly have interested Van Doesburg for another reason: their echoing of filmic projection. As discussed in chapter 3, it was at this time that the artist had found promise in the works of Eggling and Richter.

121. "Een glas-in-lood raam, zuiver modern opgelost blijft in de eerste plaats raam, met als contrast: kleur. Een glas-in-lood kompositie is dus een rythmisch gebroken raam of juister een rythmisch gebroken lichtveld, dat door de kleur rythme en harmonie beeldt. In zulk een raam wordt het begrip der architectuur wel het zuiverst verwerkelijkt." Letter from Van Doesburg to De Boer, October 24, 1920. Reproduced in Hoek, *Theo van Doesburg*, 299.

His comments indicate the importance of stained glass to his conception of an aesthetic space. Van Doesburg's evocation of musical comparisons or use of dance themes should not be taken as an attempt to directly visualize a Bach fugue in abstract form. Rather, both served as metaphors by which Van Doesburg thought through his underlying Nietzschean endeavor to force the modern subject into an active participatory experience of a new aesthetic mode of perception. The result he pursed was similar, as Elaine Miller noted, to that which Nietzsche hoped "brings about a conscious awareness of the ineluctable ambiguity of the human condition, as simultaneously actor and spectator, agent and medium of his or her own life."[122]

Translucence or Transparence? Modern Metaphors of Glass

As suggested above, the dynamic effects Van Doesburg desired to produce with his work in stained glass were inherently shaped by the qualities of the medium's primary element: glass. Despite its frequent association in modernist myths with transparency and all of its social and cultural signifiers—from agent of panoptic surveillance to a sterile material of healthy living—the materiality of glass, and its natural manifestation as a crystalline substance, holds another history.[123] In her genealogical survey of glass and crystal across the history of Western literature and architecture, Rosemarie Haag Bletter charted a compelling alternative lineage of symbolic meaning in these materials.[124] Glass, Bletter's

122. Miller, "Harnessing Dionysus," 8.

123. My thinking on the materiality of glass and its relation to modernism has been strongly informed by the work of Jenny Anger. See Jenny Anger, "Glass," in *Four Metaphors of Modernism:* Der Sturm *and the* Société Anonyme (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2018).

124. Rosemarie Haag Bletter, "The Interpretation of the Glass Dream—Expressionist Architecture and the History of the Crystal Metaphor," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 40, no. 1 (March 1981): 20–43.

survey revealed, retained two principal threads of metaphorical significance by the opening of the twentieth century. Both of these lines alluded to the transformative properties of the glass. The first was rooted in the transmutable nature of glass or crystal formation. The creation of either substance involved the transformation of dull and ordinary materials, through geological or artificial forces, into a new, glistening substance. This property of glass, Bletter noted, became associated in Christian symbolism with the transfiguration of Christ, and in agnostic practice with the alchemical search for the philosopher's stone.[125] The second pertained to the installation of glass windows within an architectural space during the medieval period. Glass was the nexus between the spiritual and earthly realms, as manifested in the luminous colored light that flooded into Gothic churches. Glass thus served as a bridge for transcendence. Bletter wrote, "The true function of stained glass was within the scope of a mystical, transcendent light: a light that illuminates the soul of the worshiper."[126]

These two genealogies of glass's symbolism found renewed resonance with Romantic artists, architects, and writers who aligned these themes of transformation and transcendence with secular notions of natural vitality and artistic creativity. Nietzsche marshaled such transformational metaphors of glass and crystal, for example, in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, as Zarathustra's quest for self-apotheosis encouraged a similar

125. Bletter, "Glass Dream," 28.

126. Bletter, "Glass Dream," 27. Ufuk Ersoy addressed this position further in the following way: "First, the approval of the anthropological change in the late medieval period that endorsed the participation of the body in intelligibility through the senses and, second, the syncretism of 'spiritual and earthly manifestations.'" Ufuk Ersoy, "Seeing through Glass: The Fictive Role of Glass in Shaping Architecture from Joseph Paxton's Crystal Palace to Bruno Taut's Glashaus" (PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 2008), 192.

transformation in the arts.[127] Nietzsche's mystical writings and symbolist thought were united in the early twentieth century by the likes of Paul Scheerbart (1863–1915), Bruno Taut (1880–1938), and Peter Behrens (1868–1940). Behrens, for example, presented the play *Das Zeichen* (*The Sign*) in 1901 to an audience at the opening celebration of the Darmstadt artists' colony.[128] The performance was a direct reference to Zarathustra's transcendent emergence from his hermetic cave, radiantly glowing like the sun.[129] Crucially, on the poster for *Das Zeichen*, Behrens presents a crystalline form emanating light. Bletter wrote regarding this image, "He seems to return to the mystical tradition in which crystal signifies transformation. But he gives the tradition a slightly new direction: crystal stands for the metamorphosis of everyday life into a heightened artistic experience. In essence, the crystal represents for Behrens an escape from reality into a world of the artist's own making, above the squalor of common life."[130]

These prewar discourses, which Van Doesburg was well aware of, informed his understanding of glass. He showed interest and care in the selection of each piece of glass to be included in his windows. Van Doesburg wrote about this process when selecting glass for *Composition II* at the Crabeth workshop in The Hague: "Now [the cartoon] is

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127. Bletter writes, "Zarathustra. Light/dark opposites are used to delineate Zarathustra's road to self-knowledge. He inhabits a cave on a mountain peak, a clear metaphor for the mind. The two beasts attending him, eagle and snake, are an even older variant of the ancient chthonic and celestial forces. Images of Zarathustra's self or soul are as eclectic as Nietzsche's metaphors for the struggle between earthly body and disembodied mind. Zarathustra compares his soul to a fountain, a child offers him a mirror for self-reflection, and he is himself addressed as the 'Stone of Wisdom.' Alchemical metaphors of transmutation now only stand for a narcissistic self-apotheosis." Bletter, "Glass Dream," 30.

128. Bletter, "Glass Dream," 30.

129. "But in the morning after this night Zarathustra jumped up from his bed, girded his loins and came out of his cave, glowing and strong, like the morning sun coming out of dark mountains." Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 279.

130. Bletter, "Glass Dream," 31.

with the workshop in The Hague and will be set in stained glass in ten days. How wonderful it is to choose colors with the stained-glassmaker! Each color is checked against the design. Each line is considered."[131] Of special importance to Van Doesburg was that his compositions conveyed the color of the glass itself, free of any enamel painting. This point was emphasized at the end of the *Bouwkundig Weekblad* article published under Oud's name: "Van Doesburg does not paint on the glass, because this prevents a pure color ratio and contrast."[132] His approach is evident in the glass selected for *Dance I* and *Dance II*, both of which consist of pieces of hand-blown cylinder glass.[133] His emphasis on the use of a pure, unpainted, colored glass separated his work theoretically and visually from that of many of his contemporaries working in the medium. From Bogtman's designs for the Scheepvaarthuis to Richard Roland Holst's Art-Deco windows, these artists relied on grisaille painting to introduce figures or motifs into their abstract compositions.[134] For Van Doesburg, the practice reflected an anachronistic approach to stained-glass window design, one that echoed Renaissance traditions rather than speaking to the needs of the modern built environment and those inhabiting it.

His insistence on the use of pure, unpainted glass was to ensure that the light passing through the prismatic material was sufficient, while also meeting the demands of

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131. "Nu is het bij den uitvoerder te Den Haag en zal over 10 dagen in glas en lood zijn gezet. Hoe heerlijk is dat uitzoeken van de kleuren bij de glas en loodzetter! Elke kleur wordt getoetst aan het ontwerp. Elke lijn wordt overwogen." Letter from Van Doesburg to Kok, May 3, 1917, reprinted in Ottevanger, *De Stijl overall absolute leiding*, 185.

132. "Beschildering van het glas past van Doesburg niet toe, omdat dit een zuivere kleurverhouding en tegenstelling belet." Oud, "Glas-in-lood van Theo van Doesburg," 202.

133. Catherine Hess and Karol Wright, *Looking at Glass: A Guide to Terms, Styles, and Techniques* (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2005), 88.

134. Hoogveld, *Glas in Lood*, 77.

contemporary medical studies that correlated exposure to light with greater health. He also refrained from the use of grisaille, in order to ensure that the emanating chromatic spectrum was unmediated. At the root of both of Van Doesburg's concerns was his understanding that stained glass was not a neutral medium, but rather had a direct impact on the nature and perception of the interior. Hence reasons for avoiding glass painting became increasingly important as Van Doesburg took greater control of the designation of interior color schemes. This was the case with his designs for the monumental tile floor and doors of De Vonk. For the project, Oud had commissioned Harm Kamerlingh Onnes (1893–1985)—Menso's son, and Oud's friend—to create a stained-glass window for the stairwell of the building (fig. 6.46). After it was installed, Van Doesburg responded to the final effect with intense dissatisfaction:

> I just had a quick look at what is left of the hall. I would rather see a chamber pot on every step, a little mat on every square decimeter of the floor, than what has actually been done. In the five window openings are five large sheets of colored glass shards without . . . reason, but with an oppressive chromatic atmosphere in which every fresh idea, every healthy breath is ruined. *The Light is the Space*. Where an unthinkable dilettante has now hidden the lovely sky with a monstrous glass creation in a garish muddling of predominantly murky, capricious blues and vulgar red colors, which are all then covered in oil paint, it goes without saying that the bit of space that we created with effort and care is completely destroyed and the hall is transformed into a dark corridor with some tiles mixed together on the floor. Since the light is missing, none of this makes sense anymore.[135]

135. "Ook heb ik nog even naar de overblijfselen van de hall gekeken. Liever vond ik op elke trede een kamerpot, op elke vierkante decimeter vloer een matje, dan wat er nu gebeurd is. In de vijf vensteropeningen zijn vijf groote lappen van gekleurde glas-scherven aangebracht, scherven zonder [onleesbaar] of zin doch van een benauwende kleurenatmosfeer, waarin elke frissche gedachte elke gezonde ademhaling verpest wordt. Het Licht is de Ruimte. Waar hier nu een onnadenkende dilettant den lieven hemel verstopt heeft met gedrochtelijke glasvorming in een

Van Doesburg made explicit here that the definition and experience of interior space were fundamentally linked to light. The dampening and distortion of light by Onnes's window at De Vonk had rendered the De Stijl artist's own interior designs, in his view, ineffective.

In a letter to Antony Kok, Van Doesburg described the decidedly different effect he achieved in the De Lange house with *Composition IV*. He wrote, "In a word, it is overwhelming. The whole thing emerges against the sky. The color composition is completely free in space."[136] Van Doesburg's language addresses the luminosity of the window, describing it as standing out against the light of the sky. He further acknowledges the projective quality of the composition, as the emanating colors generated by the *Composition IV* move into the space of the stairwell. This effect was not only the result of the presence of pure primary and secondary glass panes; it also relied on the texture of the glass itself. Van Doesburg consistently demonstrated a sensitivity to the opacity and texture of glass when conceiving his windows. A drawing in the Centraal Museum illustrates the artist's careful consideration of the differing textures of glass and their subsequent effect on the composition. In *Study for a Stained-Glass Composition* (1917; fig. 6.47), an abstract composition is created with rectangular forms meant to represent the pieces of glass in a window. In the center of this group of planes is a

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bonte wanorde van duistere grillige overwegend blauw en gemeen roode kleuren, welke alle nog met olieverf overklad zijn, spreekt het vanzelf dat het beetje ruimte dat door ons met moeite en zorg werd geschapen, totaal vernietigd is en de hall herschapen is in een duister gangetje waar op de grond wat tegeltjes door elkaar liggen. Daar het licht ontbreekt, heeft dit alles geen zin meer" (emphasis mine). Letter from Van Doesburg to Oud, August 19, 1918. Reprinted in Hoek, *Theo van Doesburg,* 220.

136. "Het is in één woord overweldigend. Het geheel komt tegen de lucht uit. De kleuren compositie staat geheel los in de ruimte." Letter from Van Doesburg to Kok, September 9, 1917. Reprinted in Ottevanger, *De Stijl overall absolute leiding,* 205.

collection of "clear" rectilinear forms which echo the shape and style of the abstract figures Van Doesburg experimented with at the time, such as *Carrying, Abstracted* (1917; fig. 6.48). These "clear" planes are surrounded by a geometric field of planes that have been filled in with black ink lines. These linear infills are intended to convey the textured surface of the panes of glass they represent, and to indicate a material difference between the interior motif and the boundary field.

Van Doesburg employed this strategy of difference in material between a motif and its defining boundary in *Composition IV*. In the window, the primary- and secondary-colored panes that comprise the three vertical compositions are all likely made of cylinder glass, which has a relatively smooth surface. Some of the glass is punctuated by varying amounts of seed—gas bubbles in the glass. The texture of the glass comprising the abstract motif is juxtaposed with the glass panes that frame it. Van Doesburg's windows are typically photographed with the works backed by a white, translucent paper and illuminated from behind. In reproductions of works such as *Composition IV*, these panes appear both white—evocative of the white field of a canvas—and simultaneously transparent, free of any material qualities. Yet this photographic representation fails to depict the actual material nature of *Composition IV*. The "white" panes in the photograph, in reality, are uncolored pieces of glass. Their surfaces are also highly textured (fig. 6.49). Van Doesburg chose to use cathedral glass for the uncolored sections of the window. This type of glass, as discussed above, is made by pouring molten glass onto a metal table and rolling it flat as it rapidly cools, creating a highly textured sheet of glass. The textural difference between the undulating surfaces of the cathedral glass and the smoothness of the colored cylinder glass allows the abstract motifs of *Composition IV* to

stand out more starkly, and as Van Doesburg alluded to in his letter to Kok, project freely into space.

The projective nature of stained glass into architectural space was crucial to Van Doesburg's conceptualization of an aesthetic interior. His marshaling of colored and textured glass shielded the interior behind a *translucent* veil. Jenny Anger has brought attention to the significance of translucency in modernist architecture. Contrary to the dystopian implications of surveillance and indifference inherent in *transparent* glass, she notes that "Translucence, it seems, may lend itself better to utopia."[137] There was no clearer example of this than Bruno Taut's Glashaus, built for the 1914 German Werkbund exhibition in Cologne (fig. 6.50). Van Doesburg was well aware of Taut's work. Not only did he include in the De Stijl library Taut's *The City Crown* (1919), as well as the 1915 *Werkbund Jahrbücher* which reproduced photographs of the Glashaus (fig. 6.51), he also visited the architect when he first traveled to Berlin at the end of 1920.[138] Taut's glass pavilion was itself inspired by the writings of Paul Scheerbart (1863–1915), notably his 1914 text, *Glass Architecture.* In its first chapter, Scheerbart explicitly addressed the relationship between the built environment and development of culture. He wrote:

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137. Anger, *Four Metaphors of Modernism*, 141.

138. Baljeu, *Theo van Doesburg,* 41. In his correspondence with Léonce Rosenberg regarding his design for the gallerist's studio, Van Doesburg specifically draws upon Taut's most famous text, *Alpine Architecture* (1919), writing, "Your Atelier must be like a glass cover or like an empty crystal. It must have an absolute purity, a constant light, a clear atmosphere. It must also be white. The palette must be of glass. Your pencil sharp, rectangular and hard, always free of dust and as clean as an operating scalpel. One can certainly take a better lesson from doctors' laboratories than from painters' ateliers. The latter are cages that stink like sick apes. Your atelier must have the cold atmosphere of mountains 3,000 meters high; eternal snow must lie there. Cold kills the microbes." Quoted in A. Elzas, "Theo van Doesburg," *De 8 en Opbouw* 6 (1935): 174. Quoted and translated in Troy, *De Stijl Environment*, 106.

> We live for the most part in closed rooms. These form the environment from which our culture grows. Our culture is to a certain extent the product of our architecture. If we want our culture to rise to a higher level, we are obliged, for better or for worse, to change our architecture. And this only becomes possible if we take away the closed character from the rooms in which we live. We can only do that by introducing glass architecture, which lets in the light of the sun, the moon, and the stars, not merely through a few windows, but through every possible wall, which will be made entirely of glass—of *colored glass*. The new environment, which we thus create, must bring us a new culture.[139]

Scheerbart's emphasis on glass, specifically colored glass, was essential. When he spoke of the need to open architecture, it was not a literal opening up through transparency, but rather an aesthetic opening which countered the dark and utilitarian nature of traditional architecture. He writes later in the text, "When I am in my glass room, I shall hear and see nothing of the outside world. If I long for the sky, the clouds, woods and meadows, I can go out or repair to an extra-veranda with transparent glass panes."[140] The glass architecture conceived by the German writer was meant to shield the modern subject from the outside world. Free of the natural world, it was also fundamentally artificial, or put differently, purely aesthetic.

Taut embraced these principles and incorporated them into his design of the Glashaus.[141] The immersive space brought together not only a wide variety of types of glass—from Luxfer prisms to glass chandeliers and mosaics—but a wide variety of experiences, "from the exclusively optic to partially haptic" and the reflective to the

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139. Emphasis mine. Paul Scheerbart, *Glass Architecture*, trans. James Palmes (New York: Praeger, 1972), 41. (Originally published as *Glasarchitektur* [Berlin: Der Sturm, 1914]).

140. Scheerbart, *Glass Architecture*, 52.

kaleidoscopic.[142] Anger has convincingly argued that the entire success of Taut's Glashaus rested on the translucency of the glass employed for the project:

> Translucence is essential here. Pondering the utopian potential of glass while traversing the space of the pavilion might lead one to think expansively about the world. Precisely because one *could not see* outside, the visitor might be more likely to relinquish control of time and space, that is to allow for the charged atmosphere to work its magic. . . . Thus the *Glashaus* activated a power traditionally attributed to theater, a darkened space explicitly shut off from the outside world.[143]

Anger's evocation of the translucence and the theatrical space is noteworthy. As an entirely immersive installation space, the result was one of fantasy, affect, and transformation.[144]

Conclusion

Anger's description tempts us to reformulate her statement on the condition of translucency quoted above: "translucence, it seems, may lend itself better to *heterotopia*."

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141. Kai Gutschow, "From Object to Installation in Bruno Taut's Exhibit Pavilions," *Journal of Architectural Education* 59, no. 4 (May 2006): 63–64.

142. Gutschow, "From Object to Installation," 66. For further discussion of Luxfer glass, see Dietrich Neumann, "'The Century's Triumph in Lighting': The Luxfer Prism Companies and Their Contribution to Early Modern Architecture," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 54, no. 1 (March 1995): 24–53. Anger has provided a detailed description of the processional route a visitor would take through the building, past the Luxfer prism walls which concentrated light, into the darker lower level of the structure, where a kaleidoscopic projection was used to create a shifting chromatic environment. See Anger, *Four Metaphors of Modernism*, 135–38.

143. Anger, *Four Metaphors of Modernism*, 141.

144. Taut emphasized the affective properties of glass and their importance to the formation of a modern culture. Visitors entering the building would pass beneath aphorisms incised into the concrete beam at the base of the glass dome, which included "Colored glass destroys hatred," and "Without a glass palace life becomes a burden." Dennis Sharp, "Introduction," in *Glass Architecture*, 14.

As discussed in detail in chapter 4, essential to De Stijl artists' early projects in interior design was the segregation of such spaces from the built environment in which they were conceived. The independence of the De Stijl interior was crucial in the formation of spaces that could be realized as the initial sites of the manifestation of the "new man." The translucent rather than transparent properties of stained-glass windows facilitated this project. For Van Doesburg, as for Taut's Glashaus, the visually permeable skin of stained glass simultaneously sealed in and opened up the interior. Even Huszar, who would come to disagree with Van Doesburg on the presence of color in his windows, still used differing textures of cathedral glass in his otherwise uncolored windows, downplaying transparency in favor of translucence. "The translucent artwork promises transformation," Anger wrote, continuing:

> . . . but part of its point is *not* to position the viewer as omniscient. The way to greater spiritual and intellectual growth—and potential communion with humanity, if not the universe—is to look very closely and experience something that we cannot see all the way through or the limits of which are marked by a frame. It is a multisensory beholding, joined with the intellect, a relationship with the world imagined by Nietzsche, Bergson, and [Alfred] Döblin.[145]

Van Doesburg's use of stained glass was motivated by its ability to speak directly to the senses and inspire a state of heightened sensitivity. It is thus not a coincidence that metaphors of music and dance, with their Nietzschean origins in such direct and affective sensorial stimulation, were inscribed in his windows. Color, as Ersoy observed, was crucial to this process: "Glass, especially colored glass, which can catch and color the sunlight, could dematerialize the surface while it clads the room—*Raumumhüllung.* The

145. Anger, *Four Metaphors of Modernism*, 161.

colored glass surface not only rendered the interaction between light and surface perceivable but also made the luminosity appear differently than that seen in ordinary vision."[146]

This concern with perception was of the utmost importance for Van Doesburg, for it went to the heart of the artist's alignment with Nietzsche's belief that only through an aesthetic revolution can modern man and society be awakened to the affirmative qualities of life. He expressed these exact sentiments when writing to his close friend Evert Rinsema regarding his final collaborative effort with Cornelis de Boer, who allowed Van Doesburg to comment on and contribute to his design for a new building he was designing for the Christian ULO School in Drachten.[147] The artist's suggestions are conveyed in a blueprint of the building upon which he made corrections in pencil (fig. 6.52). Along with replacing the neoclassical flourishes with more modern, geometric elements, Van Doesburg also insisted on the inclusion of stained-glass windows. In total, he was commissioned to produce twelve windows for the building. As in previous projects, all of the windows were installed at points of liminality in the architecture—in the stairwell and entrance. Now, unlike the Agricultural School, a figurative motif was not stipulated as a requirement. He produced windows in vibrant patterns of panes of glass in pure primary colors, as for example in the large transom window now in the collection of the Davis Museum of Art at Wellesley College (fig. 6.53). His vision here,

146. Ufuk Ersoy, "The Fictive Quality of Glass," *Architectural Research Quarterly* 11, no. 3/4 (December 2007): 240.

147. Van Straaten, *Theo van Doesburg*, 93.

as it had been in his many endeavors in stained glass before 1923, was, as he wrote to Rinsema, "to create large color spaces that will enhance and ennoble life."[148]

148. Letter from Van Doesburg to Rinsema, June 24, 1923, quoted and translated in Van Straaten, *Theo van Doesburg*, 93.

7 Modernism in Recline: De Stijl and the Furnishing of the Future Interior

In 1918, Gerrit Rietveld (1888–1964) assembled his assistants for a photograph outside of his newly opened workshop on Adriaen van Ostadelaan in Utrecht (fig. 7.1).[1] In the image, his three teenage assistants pose casually with cigarettes in hand while leaning against the workshop's window. Above their heads the shop's logo is visible, partially cut off by the edge of the photograph. At the center of the group is Rietveld himself. Rather than standing alongside his assistants, he is seated in front of them with legs crossed and a cigarette in hand, reinforcing the informality of the scene. Importantly, the chair Rietveld selected to sit in was a new design just completed.[2] According to one of his assistants, he thought the design such a success that this photograph was staged in celebration of the new chair.[3]

The photograph, one of the earliest images of Rietveld's newly designed chair, has been employed by art historians to illustrate a moment of genesis—not, however, of the particular chair upon which Rietveld was sitting, but rather a later, colored iteration of it: the now iconic *Red/Blue Chair* (1923; fig. 7.2). Since its inclusion in Alfred Barr's

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1. Ida van Zijl, *Gerrit Rietveld* (New York: Phaidon, 2010), 18–19. The shop was opened in 1917, and Martin Filler has dated the photograph to that year. See Martin Filler, "The Furniture of Gerrit Rietveld: Manifestoes for a New Revolution," in *De Stijl: 1917–1931; Visions of Utopia*, ed. Mildred Friedman (New York, Abbeville, 1982), 126. However, because the chair upon which Rietveld sits has been convincingly argued to be dated to 1918 (see n. 2 below), I date that photograph to 1918.

2. Frits Bless argued for the 1918 date in his *Gerrit Rietveld: Een Biografie* (Amsterdam: Bakker, Baarn, Rap, 1982), 25. Subsequent scholars have accepted this date, including Marijke Küper, Ida van Zijl, Peter Vöge, and Paul Overy. See Marijke Küper and Ida van Zijl, *Gerrit Rietveld: The Complete Works* (Utrecht: Centraal Museum, 1992), 74–76; and Peter Vöge, ed., *The Complete Rietveld Furniture* (Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 1993), 50.

3. Küper and Van Zijl, *Gerrit Rietveld*, 75.

exhibition "Cubism and Abstract Art" in 1936, Rietveld's *Red/Blue Chair* has consumed modernist discourses on De Stijl furniture design. As Paul Overy has traced, the *Red/Blue Chair* emerged as a paradigmatic example of modernism's radical rebuke of historical precedents, entering the canon as an article of furniture sui generis.[4] Such antihistorical readings of Rietveld's furniture by scholars such as Siegfried Giedion, Daniele Baroni, and Martin Filler dislodged Rietveld's practice from a critical discussion of the relationship between his work and the history of furniture design specifically, and the decorative arts more broadly.[5] As a result, art historians have tended to discuss Rietveld's designs in largely sculptural terms.[6] When the *Red/Blue Chair* has been discussed through the lens of design history, however, the chair has frequently been emplotted on a teleological line that charts the advancement of the modernist machine aesthetic, which culminated in the tubular steel furniture of Marcel Breuer (1902–1881) and Le Corbusier (1887–1965) at the end of the 1920s.

Yet a closer examination of the photograph discussed above quickly complicates these readings and historiographical positions regarding Rietveld's furniture, as it reveals a more complex series of operations present in De Stijl furniture design during the early years of the group. For example, dressed in aprons and smocks, Rietveld and his

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4. Paul Overy, "Carpentering the Classic: A Very Peculiar Practice. The Furniture of Gerrit Rietveld," *Journal of Design History* 4, no. 3 (1991): 155–59. Such a view was aided by the sparseness of Rietveld's public statements about his work before 1925.

5. Overy, "Carpentering the Classic," 157. See Siegfried Giedion, *Mechanization Takes Command: A Contribution to Anonymous History* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1948), 485; Daniele Baroni, *The Furniture of Gerrit Thomas Rietveld* (New York: Barron's, 1978), 47; and Filler, "Furniture of Gerrit Rietveld," 126.

6. Paul Overy, for example, is unable to avoid such a taxonomical impulse. In his attempt to construct a postmodern understanding of De Stijl by tracing the group's production not chronologically but thematically, he combined furniture and sculpture into one thematic chapter. See Overy, "Sculpture and Furniture," in *De Stijl,* 73–86 (see chap. 1, n. 7).

assistants hardly convey the appearance of a modern artist-as-producer clad in factory overalls. Rather, their dress harks back to the kind of nineteenth-century attire suitable for an artist-as-craftsman. This evocation of craft traditions and aesthetics is reinforced by the logo Rietveld designed for the founding of his workshop, which incorporated woodcut block lettering and a depiction of a carpenter at work (fig. 7.3). In addition, the chair he sits on is frequently referred to as the "prototype" for the *Red/Blue Chair*.[7] Such a designation, though, imbues the chair with a value that is predicated on its lineage in the evolution toward its 1923 iteration. It is important to note, however, that Rietveld actively promoted this new design the following year, exhibiting it at the "Exhibition for Aesthetically Executed Utilitarian Objects" held at the Arts and Crafts Museum in Haarlem.[8] Finally, and a point rarely emphasized, this photograph is the only contemporaneous image—to my knowledge—that shows a figure actually using Rietveld's chair. The absence of photographs depicting his furniture in use has encouraged art historians to analyze these works through the lens of sculpture at the expense of probing the inherent significance of the types of furniture Rietveld chose to reimagine. This tantalizing fact exposes a broader point that has been overlooked when Rietveld's work in particular, and De Stijl's furniture more broadly, has been analyzed: their furniture did not exist nor was it experienced in isolation, removed from its intended

7. For examples of this common rhetorical framing, see Filler, "Furniture of Gerrit Rietveld," 128, or Vöge, *Complete Rietveld Furniture*, 50.

8. The exhibition "Tentoonstelling van aesthetisch uigevoerde gebruiksvoorontworpen" was held from September 22 to October 22, 1919. Marijke Küper, "Gerrit Rietveld," in Blotkamp, *The Formative Years,* 267 (see chap. 1, n. 17).The exhibition was organized in collaboration with the Association for Technical and Applied Art (Vereeniging van Ambachts- en Nijverheidskunst), and in a review of the exhibition Rietveld is mentioned as a participant along with Jan Wils and Theo van Doesburg. See *Nederlandsche Ambachts: En Nijverheidskunst Jaarboek, 1920* (Rotterdam: W. L. & J. Brusse, 1920), 70–74.

environments. To best represent the historical significance of these works, they must also be considered within the spaces where they were commissioned.

Furniture and decorative objects occupied a place of pivotal importance for De Stijl, as they act as the central nexus between its vision of a future built environment and the subject's experience of such spaces. As a result, the concerns raised by this photograph of Rietveld warrant further examination. This chapter will present a clearer understanding of the role furniture played in De Stijl theory and polemics, in order to address underdiscussed aspects of these works frequently occluded by modernist myths surrounding De Stijl furniture design. To do so, this chapter will first explore the forms that De Stijl's early furniture design took and their central position in the group's contentious debates on the relationship between the decorative arts and architecture. This will be complemented by an investigation of the role of materiality in the execution of the group's furniture designs. Both subjects will then be brought together in order to examine how De Stijl marshaled color to create a unified aesthetic environment for a modern subject. While Rietveld will be the focal point of this chapter, the present discussion will also seek to move beyond his work and examine furniture designed through collaborations between Vilmos Huszar, Piet Klaarhamer, Jan Wils, and Theo van Doesburg.

A Turn toward the Decorative Object

The year after Rietveld posed in front of his Utrecht workshop with his recently designed armchair, a photograph of the chair was reproduced in the September issue of *De Stijl*

(fig. 7.4).[9] It appears that Rietveld had had little knowledge of the journal or its principal figures before 1919.[10] His first contact with De Stijl came through a commission he received from J. N. Verloop. Rietveld was asked to produce copies of furniture by Frank Lloyd Wright from photographic reproductions in a book on the American architect's work that Verloop owned.[11] The furniture was intended to integrate seamlessly into Verloop's recently completed home (1914–15) designed by Robert van 't Hoff, which drew upon aspects of Wright's architectural practice (fig. 7.5).[12] Impressed by the craftsmanship of Rietveld's replicas, Van 't Hoff, who had met Wright while traveling through the United States, visited his workshop and likely put Rietveld in contact with Van Doesburg some time in 1919.[13]

Following their introduction, Van Doesburg made his enthusiasm for Rietveld's furniture clearly evident. The *De Stijl* editor would go on to reproduce four of the furniture maker's designs in the periodical's pages in less than a year. The photographs that Van Doesburg received from Rietveld and chose to publish were spartan. Rather than displaying the furniture as one element among many within a staged interior, the run of photographs from this period were all staged in a studio. In the image of the *Armchair*,

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9. *De Stijl* 2, no. 11 (September 1919): plate XXII, n.p.

10. Küper, "Gerrit Rietveld," 262.

11. Theodore Brown, *The Work of G. Rietveld Architect* (Utrecht: A. W. Bruna & Zoon, 1958), 23.

12. According to Brown, the commission was made in 1918. Brown, *The Work of G. Rietveld Architect,* 23. However, Küper and Van Zijl, drawing upon the work of Frits Bless, make a convincing argument that the commission was likely received around 1916 and finished by 1917. Küper and Van Zijl, *Gerrit Rietveld,* 69.

13. Küper notes that while there are other ways in which Rietveld may have entered the De Stijl orbit—this includes his interactions with the Utrecht artists Erich Wichman (1887–1954), Janus de Winter (1882–1951), or the architect Piet Klaarhamer, or even directly with Van Doesburg, who gave a number of lectures in Utrecht—it is most likely that Van 't Hoff was the mediator. See Küper, "Gerrit Rietveld," 262–63.

for example, the chair stands alone as an object in a field of gray. The single angle of the photograph differs from the more didactic representation of his earlier *Child's Chair* (1918; fig. 7.6)—the first work of Rietveld's to be reproduced in *De Stijl*—which showed three angles of the chair.[14] The photograph's silence provided the space for Van Doesburg to explain his underlying attraction to the design: "Through its new form, this piece of furniture gives an answer to the question of what place sculpture will occupy in the new interior. Our chairs, tables, cupboards and other utilitarian objects are the (abstract–real) images in our future interior."[15] Rietveld, who spoke little publicly about his work before 1925, wrote a letter to Van Doesburg thanking him for the support, writing, "It is most joyful to note that while I was always on my own, there are others who felt and thought the same."[16]

Van Doesburg's brief analysis of Rietveld's *Armchair* is noteworthy, because in this short passage he explained his conception of the chair as operating dualistically: as both sculpture (*beeldhouwkunst*), or an object in the round; and as image (*beelden*), or representation. Van Doesburg thus did not necessarily conceive Rietveld's furniture as purely sculptural in nature, as scholars have suggested.[17] Rather, in characterizing Rietveld's furniture in such a way, whether consciously or not, he placed such objects in

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14. The photographic reproductions were accompanied by an explanatory text by Rietveld. See Gerrit Rietveld, "Aanteekening bij kinderstoel (bijlage no. XVIII)' [Notes on a child's chair (illustration no. XVIII)], *De Stijl* 2, no. 9 (July 1919): 102.

15. "Op de vraag, welke plaats de beeldhouwkunst in het nieuwe intérieur zal innemen, geeft dit meubel, door zijn nieuwen vorm, een antwoord: Onze stoelen, tafels, kasten en andere gebruiksvoorwerpen dat zijn de (abstract–reëele) beelden in ons toekomstig intérieur." Theo van Doesburg, "XXII. Aanteekeningen bij een leunstoel van Rietveld" [XXII. Notes on an armchair by Rietveld], *De Stijl* 2, no. 11 (September 1919): n.p.

16. Letter from Rietveld to Van Doesburg, dated October 7, 1919. Repr. and trans. in Küper, "Gerrit Rietveld," 262.

17. See for example Overy, *De Stijl*, 73–74.

the kind of intermediary category historically occupied by ornament, which frequently existed both sculpturally and representationally within or upon a broader supporting structure. Alina Payne has discussed the shared features of utilitarian objects and ornament, writing, "Both are small scale relative to architecture; both are (mostly) three dimensional, whether carved or cast, assembled or poured; and both elicit the sense of touch, projecting 'graspability,' the potential of being held in the hand."[18] As a result, with these two short sentences, Van Doesburg situated Rietveld's chair specifically, and modern furniture more broadly, as occupying a liminal position between ornament, architecture, and the human body.

In describing the *Armchair* as he did, Van Doesburg located Rietveld's furniture within a broader shift in the decorative arts. As has been argued, perhaps most persuasively by Payne, beginning in the latter half of the nineteenth century, the traditional signifiers that made the spaces of the built environment legible—a rhetorical burden historically carried by ornamentation—were slowly transferred to the objects that inhabited such spaces.[19] The stability of ornament's rhetorical function was thrust into doubt around the time of the 1851 Great Exhibition in London, at which, as discussed in previous chapters, a vast quantity of industrially produced objects and newly invented materials upended the certainty with which the value—both material and historical—of ornament and object could be determined. Gottfried Semper was one of the first to address this issue critically and provide a theoretical foundation that turned increasing

18. Payne, *Ornament to Object*, 13 (see chap. 2, n. 15).

19. "Traditionally, architectural ornament had functioned as the vehicle to 'explain' architecture, to domesticate its abstraction in terms accessible to the viewer—figural, three-dimensional, more representational and animated, scaled to communicate with the bodies that inhabited it." Payne, *Ornament to Object*, 8.

attention toward the objects of use in one's life. In his ontological quest to establish a genealogy of ornament, he not only traced ornament's origins to decorative objects of use—textiles, the hearth, ceramics, and so on—he did so by incorporating a number of novel methodological approaches, such as archaeology, anthropology, and ethnography.[20] Semper's theoretical elevation of decorative objects paralleled a broader nineteenth-century archival logic, which witnessed a rapid expansion in the popularity of museums and publications dedicated to the taxonomical categorization, both historical and aesthetic, of objects. As Payne observed:

> In the process, ornament lost its status as theory site for architecture and relinquished it to the object of daily use—which absorbed it and gradually attracted the architects as well. In a world focused on display, architecture itself entered the world of objects. . . . Indeed, ornament retained an interest only inasmuch as it interacted with objects and its relationship to architecture faded into the background. As Stephen Bann has noted, once the past 'could be aroused by the unmediated perception of objects' and gained an 'experiential reality' through them, that is, as history moved from metonymy to synecdoche, objects became invested with significant theoretical power.[21]

Payne further asserted that this theoretical shift, initiated by Semper, had reached its peak with Alois Riegl, who imbued utilitarian objects with "the role of cultural catalyst" through his theorization of the notion of *Kunstwollen*.[22] Van Doesburg further articulated this broader theoretical turn by collapsing the difference between object and architecture: "In all these products, whether iron bridges, locomotives, automobiles, telescopes,

20. Payne, *Ornament to Object*, 8.
21. Payne, *Ornament to Object*, 111.
22. Payne, *Ornament to Object*, 213.

cottages, airport hangars, funicular railways, skyscrapers, or children's toys, the will toward a new style expresses itself."[23]

This shift in theoretical attention from ornament to object reached a polemical peak in the opening decades of the twentieth century, in the pan-European backlash by progressive architects and designers against Jugendstil/Art Nouveau. One point of opposition to Art Nouveau, as discussed in detail in chapter 3, was predicated on historical grounds: the movement, it was argued, was guided by capricious stylistic inventions, unmoored from the evolutionary development from which all epochal styles had previously emerged. In addition to this critique regarding style and history, however, another prominent argument against the movement was rooted in the relationship that Art Nouveau established between objects within the interior and the architecture that framed them. At the heart of the issue was the proclivity of Art Nouveau designers to integrate furnishings into architecture, fusing both into an inextricably linked decorative whole. Prominent examples include Victor Horta's (1861–1947) design for his own home in Brussels, or in the Dutch context Henry van de Velde's model interiors created for the showroom of Arts and Crafts in The Hague (1898; fig. 7.7).[24] The interdependency of objects within such *Gesamtkunstwerken* drove critics from Hermann Muthesius to Adolf Loos to attack them as ill suited to the nature and demands of modern life. On the one hand, such interior designs, comprising highly specified and crafted furnishings, failed to

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23. Van Doesburg, "The Will to Style: The Redesign of Life, Art and Technology," in *Theo van Doesburg*, 123 (see chap. 1, n. 75). (Originally published as "Der Wille zum Stil [Neugestaltung von Leben, Kunst und Technik])," *De Stijl* 5, no. 3 [March 1922]: 33–34.)

24. Jan de Bruijn, "'Verre van den Stijl der Slingerende Bloemtakken': Internationale Mode Versus Hollandse Nuchterheid" ['Well away from the style of meandering vines and leaves': International fashion versus Dutch sobriety], in *Art Nouveau in Nederland,* 48–84 (see. chap. 4, n. 4).

respond to the increasingly nomadic nature of cosmopolitan living and its dependence on industrially produced objects. On the other, as Payne argued, Art Nouveau interiors rejected the shift toward an increasingly object-focused environment: "The objects populating the Art Nouveau interior belonged together and in no other combination, and as such they escaped the economic structure that had fed the Great Exhibitions and the discourses about industrial production they had generated."[25]

Van Doesburg, along with the other members of De Stijl, bore the uneasy task of steering the group's aesthetic positions around this changing theoretical landscape in the years following World War I. The De Stijl group shared the underlying utopian motivations that fueled these various *Gesamtkunstwerken* produced by their Art Nouveau predecessors. Likewise, they affirmed the ethical nature of the object of use advocated by the Arts and Crafts movement and its tradition. Yet the group's dedication, at least rhetorically, to the cult of the machine forbade such singular, site-specific installations and commitments to craftsmanship in an effort to reconcile the legacies of both movements in the wake of the war.[26] De Stijl's middle position also placed its adherents at odds with the likes of Loos. While sharing the Viennese critic's antagonism toward nineteenth-century practices of ornamentation, De Stijl's reliance on an aestheticism rooted in Nietzschean thought squarely confronted Loos's opposition to the overtly

25. Payne, *Ornament to Object*, 215.

26. "A style which no longer aims to create individual paintings, ornaments or private houses but, rather, aims to study through team-work entire quarters of a town, sky-scrapers and airports—as the economic situation prescribes—cannot be concerned with handicraft. This can be achieved only with the aid of the machine, because handicraft represents a distinctly individual attitude which contemporary developments have surpassed. Handicraft debased *man* to the status of a machine; the correct use of the machine (to build up a culture) is the only path leading towards the opposite, social liberation." Van Doesburg, "Der Wille zum Stil," 122 (emphasis in the original).

aesthetic spaces determined by a domineering architect. Loos held that such an emphasis on aesthetics plagued the "poor little rich man" who commissioned interior designs.[27] In this context, Van Doesburg's excited discovery of Rietveld's furniture designs comes into greater focus. The several articles of furniture reproduced in the pages of *De Stijl* between 1919 and 1920 offered a means of negotiating De Stijl's unique position amid this shifting theoretical emphasis on the furnishings and objects of the modern built environment.

Forming the Objects of the Future Interior

Van Doesburg's choice to give focused attention to the form of Rietveld's *Armchair* was strategic. So was his selection of a chair to serve as the paradigmatic furnishing of the

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27. Adolf Loos, too, famously drew from this Semperian lineage in his polemical text "Ornament and Crime," to decry the practice of ornamentation as rooted in the "criminal or degenerate" practices of "primitive" man, and called for "*the removal of ornament from utilitarian objects*" (emphasis in the original). Adolf Loos, "Ornament und Verbrechen," in *Programs and Manifestoes on 20th-Century Architecture,* ed. Ulich Conrads and trans. Michael Bullock (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1975), 19–24. For further discussion see Christopher Long, "The Origins and Context of Adolf Loos's 'Ornament and Crime,'" *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 68, no. 2 (June 2009): 200–33. Stripping the architectural façade of its decorative ornament, Loos turned to the interior as the principle foundation of architectural design, arguing that "the artist, the architect, first senses the effect that he intends to realize and sees the rooms he wants to create in the mind's eye. He senses the effect that he wishes to exert upon the spectator. . . . These effects are produced by both the material and the form of the space." Adolf Loos, "The Principle of Cladding," in *Spoken into the Void: Collected Essays by Adolf Loos: 1897–1900*, trans. Jane O. Newman and John H. Smith (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1982), 77 (originally published as "Das Prinzip der Bekleidung," *Neue Freie Presse*, September 4, 1898). Yet Loos's theories of ornamentation and interior design kept intact the fundamentally bifurcated sense of architectural design which Semper, followed by August Schmarsow, was motivated to restructure. Loos simply inverted the divide, leaving the façade of the building stripped of historicist decoration, while filling his interiors with rich materials and a range of furniture. As Alina Payne noted, "Loos . . . saw modernity as the status quo—and the manifestations of this modernity did not need to be invented but were already there, since they supported life as it was lived. That is why he turns to clothes and luggage and tries to remove objects from the tyranny of design. His position, if anything, is anti-design: choose what is already there if it is good. . . . This is why ancient Egyptian and contemporary Thonet chairs could figure in his interiors with equal success and also why his interiors do not look homogenous." Payne, *Ornament to Object*, 229.

future interior. The chair operates as an object that frequently mimics architectural vocabulary in structure and ornamentation, yet exists at the scale of the body. As such, it functions as a site of intersection between building and inhabitant. As a nexus of interaction within the built environment, the chair held a unique place in the polemics on the form and nature of the modern interior at the opening of the twentieth century. This was reinforced by the ease and affordability of manufacturing chairs, making them convenient objects in which to invest theoretical capital for these ongoing debates. As Christopher Wilk noted, the chair was "a compact design problem which, because the results had a reasonably good chance of being realized at least to the stage of photography and exhibition, if not manufacture and use, held enormous appeal for designers, who were perpetually looking for work and thus valued something that might bring them attention."[28]

Van Doesburg received his first opportunity to work through the relationship between modern furniture design and its relationship to architectural form in 1918. In that year, Jan Wils was given a commission to renovate the café-restaurant De Dubbele Sleutel (The Double Key) in Woerden, and once again turned to Van Doesburg for assistance with the color schemes for the exterior and interior of the building, as well as for the furniture to fill the space (fig. 7.8). This suite of furniture included a design for a chair, smoker's table, and taboret.[29] The project coincided with the consolidation of Wils's thoughts on architecture and design through several important essays he published that year in *De Stijl,* as well as the recently established journal *Levende Kunst* (Living aArt). In "The Hall in the Home," Wils argued that the ground plan of a building could

28. Christopher Wilk, "Sitting on Air," in Wilk, *Modernism*, 227 (see chap. 1, n. 21).

reveal a number of social and political characteristics of the period in which it was built.[30] Tracing the development of architecture in Germanic and Anglo-Saxon cultures from antiquity to the present, he argued that current conditions demanded a new mode of organizing the home. He took aim at the revival of the hall by Arts and Crafts architects such as Baillie-Scott (1865–1945) and C. F. A. Voysey (1857–1941). He believed the hall to be a romantic remnant of the Middle Ages, and thus anachronistic in the present age.[31] The outdated nature of British design was compounded, he argued, by the radial symmetry often dictated by the centrality of the hall, which—as he explained in his essay "Symmetry and Culture," and as discussed at length in chapter 4 above—ran counter to the increasingly complex and asymmetrical nature of modern life, exemplified by the form of contemporary machinery.[32]

He found a solution in the work of Frank Lloyd Wright. The American architect's open floor plans, orthogonal and unornamented architectural features, and embrace of modern technological methods provided a path forward through which to create a built environment that better spoke to the present age. Wils's interest in the work of Wright is

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29. Ex and Hoek, "Jan Wils," in Blotkamp, *The Formative Years*, 190 (see chap. 1, n. 17).

30. Jan Wils, "De Hall in het Woonhuis," *Levende Kunst* 1 (1918): 184.

31. "The 'hall' is impossible from a psychological point of view. It is an anachronism, just as an electrical ornament in the shape of a Louis XIV candle crown is an anachronism. Because the fact remains that the 'hall' is a medieval institution and that we as twentieth-century figures do not feel at home in it. We have new needs, for which we seek new satisfaction. We desire our recreation, relaxation, and socializing in a completely different way than people from the fifteenth to the seventeenth centuries" [De "hall" is onbestaanbaar uit een psychologisch standpunt. Zij is een anachronisme, zooals een electrisch ornament in den vorm van een Lodewijk XIV kaarsenkroon een anachronisme is. Want het feit blijft bestaan, dat de "hall" een middeleeuwsche instelling is en wij als twintigste-eeuwers er ons niet in thuis gevoelen. Wij hebben nieuwebehoeften, waarvoor wij nieuwe bevrediging zoeken. Onze ontspanning, verpoozing, gezelligheid wenschen wij op een geheel andere wijze dan de menschen uit de 15^{e} tot 17^{e} eeuw]. Wils, "De Hall in het Woonhuis," 199.

32. Wils, "Symmetrie en Kultuur," 137–40 (see chap. 4, n. 75).

immediately evident in his design for De Dubbele Sleutel.[33] For the café-restaurant, he designed a dynamic façade by contrasting the long horizontal lines created by the concrete strips that demarcated the floors of the building with strong vertical features, the most notable being the prominent chimney. Wils insisted that the architectural project not be conceived in the dualistic terms of façade and interior. Rather, architecture existed in a continuum that extended to the objects that filled its rooms. In an article on Wright, he argued:

> It is impossible to regard the house as a separate thing, its layout as a separate thing, and the environment as a separate thing. Building, layout, environment are all one. . . . And because everything is so closely connected, it is not possible to speak of an "interior." What is inside has immediate relations with what is outside. Heaters and lamps, chairs and tables, cupboards and vases are all a part of the house. Curtains and carpets belong just as much to the composition of the house as the lime on the walls or the tiles on the roof. There is therefore no room for separately added decorations.[34]

As furnishings and objects came to play a more structural role in the articulation of architectural space and its modernity, the furniture intended for De Dubbele Sleutel garnered increased importance.

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33. The project recalls Wright's F. F. Tomek House (1904) in Riverside, Illinois, which was reproduced in the Wasmuth Portfolio. Wils reproduced images from the Wasmuth Portfolio in his article "De Nieuwe Bouwkunst: Bij het werk van Frank Lloyd Wright" [The new architecture: On the work of Frank Lloyd Wright], *Levende Kunst* 1 (1918): 207–19.

34. "Het is onmogelijk het huis als een afzonderlijk ding, zijn inrichting als een afzonderlijk ding en de omgeving weer als een afzonderlijk ding te beschouwen. Gebouw, inrichting, omgeving zijn alle één. . . . En, omdat alles zóó nauw met elkaar samenhangt, kan er ook niet gesproken worden van een 'interieur.' Wat binnen is, heeft onmiddellijke betrekkingen met wat buiten is. Verwarmingstoestellen en lampen, stoelen en tafels, kasten en vazen zijn alle een stuk van het huis. Gordijnen en tapijten behooren even zoo goed tot de compositie van het huis als de kalk op de wanden of de pannen op het dak. Voor los toegevoegde versieringen is er dan ook geen plaats." Wils, "De Nieuwe Bouwkunst," 214.

Although it was most likely never built, the chair Wils designed to fill the café exemplifies this point (fig. 7.9). In the drawing, the chair is formed by the use of the quadrature, which functions as the principal geometric device for deriving its parameters and proportions. Wils probably learned the method from Berlage, in whose office he had worked as a draftsman from 1914 until 1916.[35] Moreover, he was certainly aware of Berlage's important text *The Foundations and Development of Architecture*, in which Berlage illustrated his method for constructing furniture on the foundations of mathematics generally, and the quadrature specifically (fig. 7.10).[36] This practice of situating furniture within a geometric framework followed a tradition that had begun in the eighteenth century. It was at this time that cabinetmakers such as Thomas Sheraton (1751–1806) sought to apply mathematics in the conception of their furniture, in order to place their designs within a universal system and prevent their work from being perceived as susceptible to the whims of fashion.[37] As geometry became a panacea for the perceived turns of fashion in furniture design, reform designers working at the turn of the twentieth century, like Charles Rennie Mackintosh (1868–1928), began to place a greater emphasis on simplified, unornamented geometric from (fig. 7.11).[38]

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35. Ex and Hoek, "Jan Wils," 188.

36. Hendrik Petrus Berlage, "The Foundations and Development of Architecture: Four Lectures Delivered at the Kunstgewerbemuseum, Zurich" [*Grundlagen und Entwicklung der Architektur: Vier Vorträge gehalten im Kunstgewerbemuseum zu Zürich*] (1908), in Whyte and De Wit, *Hendrik Petrus Berlage*, 212 (see chap 1, n. 43).

37. For example, see Thomas Sheraton, *The Cabinet-maker and Upholsterer's Drawing Book, in Three Parts* (London: T. Bensley, 1793). Berlage specifically introduces his essay *Grundlagen und Entwicklung der Architektur* with the following excerpt from Sheraton's text: "Time alters fashions . . . but that which is founded on geometry and real science will remain unalterable." Berlage, *Grundlagen und Entwicklung der Architektur*, 185.

38. Kevin P. Rodel and Jonathan Binzen, *Arts & Crafts Furniture: From Classic to Contemporary* (Newtown, CT: Taunton Press, 2003), 71.

Following this tradition, Wils established a symmetrical framework to arrive at the design of his chair. Driven to introduce greater asymmetry to his work, however, he subverted this framework through a simple formal device involving the legs of the chair. Each leg was created by a flat plank of wood. He rotated the legs at the corners of the chair so that whatever angle the chair was viewed from, one leg would be seen face on and the other from its side. He reinforced the alternating pattern by inverting the planes above the supporting legs. Asymmetry was also introduced in the backrest of the chair, where Wils used the face of a board on the right to form a flat plane for support, while on the left he extended a board along the edge into the space of the chair's seat. This technique of alternation was also used in the designs for the taboret and smoker's table (fig. 7.12). Van Doesburg reinforced the sense of asymmetry in these designs by alternating the legs' colors—in the case of the chair between gray and black, and with the taboret and smoker's table between orange and black.

Wils and Van Doesburg's collaboration on the furniture for De Dubbele Sleutel illustrates several important theoretical positions that were being negotiated at this early period regarding the nature and form of De Stijl furniture design. Notably, the designs Wils conceived for the café function as paradigmatic examples of his Darwinian argument, presented in the essay "Symmetry and Culture," which traced the evolutionary passage from symmetry to asymmetry in biological organisms and artificial objects as they become more complex, and subsequently modern. Each article of furniture emerges from within a symmetrical matrix of geometric forms, only to manifest itself eventually as an asymmetrical object that announces its own modernity. Additionally, the furniture's asymmetrical appearance mirrors that of the structure of De Dubbele Sleutel. In this way,

Wils sought to establish a clear link between his theoretical positions, architectural forms, and furnishings. Yet while Wils's designs certainly would have appealed to Van Doesburg for their rationalist foundation and modern, asymmetrical appearance, they would have done so for another reason, beyond the theoretical scope of Wils's writings: movement.

Movement and the Modern Interior

The strategy of alternating asymmetrical features in Wils's designs encouraged viewers to move around each piece of furniture in order to perceive the nature of its form. This inherent invitation to embodied perception through space would have appealed greatly to Van Doesburg. At this time, the artist was developing metaphors of time, space, and movement in his writings as a way to theorize aesthetic experience in the built environment, while linking this experience to the ephemeral and accelerated condition of modern urban life. As discussed in the previous chapter, his interest was likely motivated by his reading of Nietzsche, whose philosophy underscored the importance of sensory perception in the processes of human transformation. Van Doesburg folded the notion of a subject in motion into many of his texts, often invoking the idea of movement through the concept of time or fourth-dimensionality. In an essay published in the Dutch journal *Eenheid* (Unity), for example, he argued:

> Man has the appearance of utmost internality, of spirit, does not possess any point in front, at the side or the back, no fixed point at all towards which he could define a dimension. This explains why in expressing the spiritual, in making spirit an artifact, he will be forced to a moto-stereometric form of expression. This

> moto-stereometric form of expression represents the appearance of a 4-n dimensional world in a world of three dimensions.[39]

In this as in many of Van Doesburg's early writings, however, the artist's terminology for conveying the perception of space through movement was vague. This was in part because, before embracing rhetoric and concepts derived from Albert Einstein's theory of relativity and Charles Howard Hinton's model of the tesseract in the mid-1920s, Van Doesburg drew upon a much broader undercurrent of discussion on the significance of bodily perception which was circulating throughout Europe. The artist culled ideas and concepts from popular intellectual trends from empathy theory to mathematics, to form a patchwork understanding of the modern viewing subject and the significant role the built environment had on conditioning that subject.

Semper, for example, in his theories on the decorative arts and the structure of architecture, had critically considered the effect of the human body and its movement through space as early as the middle of the nineteenth century. In his 1856 lecture "Concerning the Formal Principles of Ornament and its Significance as Artistic Symbol," Semper tied the origins of bodily adornment through three principal types—pendants, annular ornament, and what he termed "directional ornament" (that being free moving appendages such as earrings)—to a universal need to define the body in motion.[40] Semper

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39. Theo van Doesburg, "Great Masters of the Fine Arts," in Baljeu, *Theo van Doesburg*, 27. (Originally published as "Grootmeesters der beeldende Kunst," *Eenheid* no. 392 [December 8, 1917].)

40. The lecture was published by Gottfried Semper as "Über die formelle Gesetzmäßigkeit des Schmuckes und dessen Bedeutung als Kunstsymbol," *Monatsschrift des wissenschaftlichen Vereins in Zürich* 1 (1856): 101–30. For a critical overview of Semper's lecture and its influence on future discussions of ornamentation and the human body see Spyros Papapetros, "The Legacy of Gottfried Semper's 1856 Lecture on Adornment," *Anthropology and Aesthetics* 57/58 (Spring/Autumn 2010): 309–29.

expanded his ideas on the importance of movement and direction from the body to encompass its impact on ornamentation and architecture in his *Theory of Formal Beauty*, a manuscript which, although unpublished, was incorporated into the Prolegomena of *Der Stil*.[41] According to Semper, "the direction of movement" functioned as a unifying force among the decorative elements of the interior:[42]

> In man the direction of movement which is horizontal, lies at right angles to the axis of his vertical development; the same is the case with many monuments and furnishings, which have a front and a back relative to the person who turns toward them or is going to use them. In one case the person moves towards his goal, the monument; in the other case the furnishings confront the person for whose use they are meant and who is for them the unifying element.[43]

For Semper, the relation between viewer and the "monument" or "furnishing" was dynamic.[44] Debra Schafter has summarized the role of movement in Semper's theories on architecture and design in the following manner: "The technical processes associated with the industrial arts (ceramics, textiles, and masonry) and at the root of the four *Urmotiven* (hearth, enclosure, roof, and mound) gave rise to visual elements that

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41. Semper's "Theorie des Formell-Schönen" was written between 1856 and 1859. The introduction of this manuscript—from which the following translations are derived (see. nn. 42–43 below)—was translated as "The Attributes of Formal Beauty" in *Gottfried Semper: In Search of Architecture*, ed. and trans. Wolfgang Herrmann (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1984), 219–44.

42. Direction was conceived along axial lines coinciding with, for the viewing subject, the three spatial dimensions. Herrmann, *Gottfried Semper*, 228.

43. Herrmann, *Gottfried Semper*, 229.

44. In *Der Stil*, Semper distinguished the two as follows: "A piece of furniture is a *pegma* that is self-consistent and that does not require a ground as a point of support to be structurally coherent. In this it differs from the monument or architectural construction, which is *immovable*, because the base or ground on which it stands belongs, so to speak, to its system" (emphasis in the original). Gottfried Semper, *Der Stil in den technischen und tektonischen Künsten; oder, Praktische Aesthetik: Ein Handbuch für Techniker, Künstler und Kunstfreunde*, in *Gottfried Semper: Style in the Technical and Tectonic Arts; or, Practical Aesthetics*, trans. Harry Francis Mallgrave and Michael Robinson (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2004), 339.

naturally provided symbols of direction. By referring to these pre-architectural 'ideas,' artistic symbols guide the spectator's movement and, in turn, unify the architectural work."[45]

For an influential group of German aesthetic theorists publishing in the last decade of the nineteenth century, Semper's writings on movement were combined with parallel ideas presented by Robert Vischer (1847–1933)—himself drawing from Semper's thinking.[46] Particularly, it was Vischer's central concept of "empathy" (*Einfühlung*), introduced in his 1873 text *On the Optical Sense of Form: A Contribution to Aesthetics*, that gained much attention in German discourses on aesthetics.[47] Vischer's widely circulated thesis argued that all encounters with sensory stimuli generate a complex series of physical responses. The viewing body experiences these as multiple levels of generated feelings, the highest being an empathetic response, or the projection of our "mental-sensory ego" into the object being viewed.[48] One of those who embraced this notion was Adolf Hildebrand (1847–1921), who in his *Problem of Form in the Fine Arts* (1893) highlighted the importance of both optical and bodily movement for the

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45. Shafter, *Order of Ornament,* 42 (see chap. 2, n. 21).

46. Following the civil unrest that resulted from the Prussian monarchy's rejection of the proposed constitution for German unification, Vischer traveled to Zurich in 1855, where he joined other exiles like Semper and Richard Wagner. See Harry Francis Mallgrave, "Introduction," in *Empathy, Form, and Space: Problems in German Aesthetics, 1873–1893*, ed. and trans. Harry Francis Mallgrave (Santa Monica: Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities, 1994), 20.

47. Robert Vischer, *Über das optische Formgefühl: Ein Beitrag zur Aesthetik* [On the optical sense of form: A contribution to aesthetics] (Leipzig: Hermann Credner, 1873).

48. As Harry Francis Mallgrave outlines, "Sensations . . . compose only the first and lower stage in the perceptual process. They become enhanced and deepened by the mind, which creates 'ideas' or images of every sensory event. . . . The first is an instinctive compatibility or incompatibility with a certain visual image . . . the second is a feeling conditioned by motor activity. . . . There is for Vischer a third and more important level of feeling—our empathetic

viewing subject to mentally constitute an idea of the form of an object of perception. "Since we do not view nature simply as visual beings tied to a single vantage point," Hildebrand argued, "but, rather, with all our senses at once, in perpetual change and motion, we live and weave a spatial consciousness into the nature that surrounds us, even where the appearance before us offers scarcely any point of reference for the idea of space."[49] For Hildebrand, the clear articulation of space in the arts—whether in the illusionistic space of painting, the relational space of sculpture, or the encapsulating space of architecture—was imperative for imparting such a complete and true perception of form.

In conjunction with these aesthetically grounded discussions on the relationship of the body to its environment was the growing interest in mathematical and scientific writings on the nature of time and space. Couched in the far-reaching concept of the fourth dimension, this discourse gripped the popular imagination among intellectual circles in the opening decade and a half of the twentieth century.[50] While Van Doesburg had some interest in the ideas on time, space, and the fourth dimension espoused by esoteric thinkers like Dutch mathematician and theosophist Mathieu Hubertus Josephus Schoenmaekers (1875–1944), it was his contacts with cubist and futurist artists and their apologists that impressed on him the need to conceive an art that could be experienced through movement and within time. It was likely in Guillaume Apollinaire's (1880–1918)

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feeling or empathy with the form of the object." Mallgrave, "Introduction," in *Empathy, Form, and Space,* 20.

49. Adolf Hildebrand, "Das Problem der Form in der bildenden Kunst" [The Problem of Form in the Fine Arts], in Mallgrave, *Empathy, Form, and Space*, 238.

50. Linda Dalyrmple Henderson provided a important review of these discourses and their intersections with the world of twentieth-century art in *The Fourth Dimension and Non-Euclidean Geometry in Modern Art* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, rev. ed. 2013).

text *Cubist Painters* (1913) that the artist first encountered such theories of movement and time and their significance for artistic practice.[51] In the years after the war, Van Doesburg's relationship with Gino Severini (1883–1966), who served as the Paris correspondent for *De Stijl*, led to the former's greater awareness of the work of the French intellectual Henri Poincaré (1854–1912).[52] In his essay "Avant-Garde Painting," published in *De Stijl*, Severini drew heavily from Poincaré's notion of "conventionalism." Poincaré's theory rejected the uniqueness of Euclidean spatial geometry, regarding it instead as mere convention, allowing for the possibility of equally valid models of spatial geometry to exist simultaneously. Poincaré's claim unmoored the one-point perspective premised on Euclidean geometry from its privileged position, and so permitted a given subject to be represented visually from multiple positions at once.[53] In his text, Severini equated the fourth dimension—understood as movement through space—with Poincaré's theory. He presented the fourth dimension as a conceptual tool through which an artist could more accurately articulate the experience of reality.[54] Yet

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51. Guillaume Apollinaire, *Les peintres cubists (Méditations esthétiques)* (Paris, Eugène Figuière, 2nd ed. 1913), 15–17. Carel Blotkamp noted that Van Doesburg likely read Apollinaire's text as early as the year of its publication. See Blotkamp, "Theo van Doesburg," in *The Formative Years*, 29.

52. In a letter to his friend Antony Kok from September 22, 1918, Van Doesburg made a number of literary recommendations, including a 1911 German translation of a book by Poincaré entitled *Neue Mechanik* and a 1913 text by German physicist Emile Cohen, *Physikalisches über Raum und Zeit*, and suggested he review the "relativity theory" of Dutch physicist Hendrik Antoon Lorentz. The letter is reproduced in Ottevanger, *De stijl overall absolute leiding,* 238 (see chap. 1, n. 16).

53. See Mark Antliff, "Philosophies of Time and Space," in *Cubism and Culture*, ed. Mark Antliff and Patricia Leighten (New York: Thames and Hudson, 2001), 64–110.

54. "Movement thus becomes what is in reality a continuity, a synthesis of matter and energy. For our art does not want to represent a *fiction* of reality, but rather wants to express this reality as it is. This aesthetic reality is indefinable and infinite; it does not belong integrally to the reality of vision or that of knowledge but participates in both: it is so to speak life itself, or material thought in its action, and each artist is the center of the action" [Le mouvement devient ainsi ce qu'il est en réalité, une continuité, un synthèse de matière et d'énergie. Car notre art ne veut pas

for the Italian artist, this representation of fourth-dimensionality would transcend the depictions of disjointed figures in movement or multiperspectival scenes that characterized much of prewar futurism and cubism. Instead, Severini argued for representing the fourth dimension through a unified depiction of neo-Kantian noumenal forms—a position that could be incorporated into De Stijl's aim to cut cubism's ties to figuration in order to produce an entirely nonobjective visual language.[55]

Spatial-Plastic Interior Design

As discussed in chapters 4 and 5, Van Doesburg gave particular attention to the role architecture and the chromatic interior played in defining the boundaries, as well as the experience, of the built environment—a topic which will be revisited below. However, he also sought to bring greater aesthetic and theoretical attention to the nature and form of those objects that furnished interior spaces. For example, in his 1918 essay "Spatial-Plastic Interior Design," Van Doesburg analyzed a newel post (1917–18) created by Van 't Hoff. He illustrated the short essay with two images of the architect's design (fig. 7.13). Both photographs were taken of the same corner of the object, one from a higher vantage point and the other from below. The post was carved into a modular grid of cubic, columnar forms which progressively rise toward a single unit near its center.[56] The

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représenter une *fiction* de la réalité, mais veut exprimer cette réalité telle qu'elle est. Cette réalité esthétique est indéfinissable et infinie, elle n'appartient intégralement ni à la réalité de vision ni à celle de la connaissance, mais participe des deux: elle est pour ainsi dire la vie même, ou la matiére pensée dans son action et chaque artiste est le centre de cette action]. Gino Severini, "La Peinture d'Avant Garde," *De Stijl* 11, no. 10 (August 1918): 119.

55. Henderson, *The Fourth Dimension*, 442.

56. Van 't Hoff described the system he applied to the newel post thus: "By means of a gradual vertical diminishing of the number of cubes used in the horizontal base, 25 cubes square (5 × 5), it finally ends with one single cube." Reproduced and translated in Eveline Vermeulen, "Robert van 't Hoff," in Blotkamp, *The Formative Years,* 216.

gray background in the photograph distorts the object's scale. In the abstracted space, the stepped composition reads at one moment as a silhouette of a towering skyscraper, only to slide back in the next to a more diminutive size as one becomes aware of the visible grain of the wood. The blurring of scale provided Van Doesburg with an excellent comparison of the shared effect of both furnishing and architecture on the movement and perception of the viewer, and vice versa. He made this comparison explicit, writing: "A good piece of spatial-plastic, whether it is an image, house, or newel post, must make the impression as if all sides are generating simultaneously. In a manner of speaking, this eliminates the troublesome distinction between 'front,' 'back,' and 'side.' Only in this manner will the viewer, walking around the work, observe a logical development of space and volume."[57]

Drawing further upon cubist and futurist discourses, Van Doesburg added that the dissolution of clearly defined corners on the newel post was necessary in order to create a sense of unfurling from one side to the next: "Considered even from a (corner) point—as the reproduction shows—the plastic effect of adjacent sides is felt. Volume and space lock together around them."[58] The pyramidal recession of stepped forms made various sides of the post visible at once. Further, the irregular structure of their recession creates a

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57. "Een goed stuk ruimte-plastiek, onserschillig of het een beeld is, huis of trappaal, moet den indruk maken alsof alle zijden gelijktijdig zijn onstaan. Zoo is, bij wijze van spreken, het storend verschil van een 'voor', 'achter' en 'opzij' opgeheven. Slechts op deze wijze zal de beschouwer om het werk heen loopend, een logische ontwikkeling van ruimte en volume waarnemen." Theo van Doesburg, "Bij Bijlage XI. Ruimte-Plastische Binnenarchitectuur" [At a glance XI: Spatial-plastic interior design], *De Stijl* 1, no. 6 (April 1918): 71. Van Doesburg views the effect achieved by the newel post as fundamentally scalable. He says clearly in the essay that the form of the newel post could be expressed in "monumental fashion" in urban planning and architectural design.

58. "Zelfs van een hoekpunt beschouwd—zooals de reproduction doen zien—wordt de plastische werking der aan elkaar grenzende zijden gevoeld. Volumen en ruimte daaromheen sluiten in elkaar." Van Doesburg, "Ruimte-Plastische Binnenarchitectuur," 71.

syncopated silhouette of forms that was intended to stimulate an urge to move around the object. This formal device briefly occupied Van Doesburg's attention as a possible solution for several of his own designs, the most notable example of which was his drawings of a fountain for a competition held in 1917 to design a square for the northern Dutch town of Leeuwarden. The artist's submission—on which he collaborated with Wils, who provided renderings of the square—was ultimately unsuccessful.[59] All that remains of the fountain is a photograph of a glazed ceramic model Van Doesburg made in 1919 (fig. 7.14).[60] In a nearly identical fashion to Van 't Hoff's newel post, the fountain emerges from a square footprint, narrowing in asymmetrically receding modular units to a single block at its peak.[61] The only significant change in the design was the addition of a perimeter of rotating plant boxes.

Interestingly, Van Doesburg sought to link the formal operation of the fountain conceptually to that of his experiments in painting at that time—likely an attempt to ascribe the origins of this sculpture to his own oeuvre rather than Van 't Hoff's. Yet as Evert van Straaten observed, Van Doesburg's reference may not have been to his semiabstract cubist works, but rather to a recently completed painting based on his pattern for the tile floor of De Vonk (fig. 5.44). Van Straaten argued: "In this painting a composition of white, black, and yellow squares fans out from the middle in a manner recalling the fountain. Incidentally, the optical center of the composition is slightly off the focus of the painting. The same applies to the fountain: the highest point is not in line

59. Evert van Straaten has outlined the nature of the competition in detail. See *Theo van Doesburg,* 52–55 (see chap. 4, n. 61).

60. Van Straaten, *Theo van Doesburg,* 54.

with the geometric center of the sculpture."[62] Such an observation demonstrates Van Doesburg's aim to present a continuity among all of his endeavors, be it in painting, patterning, or in the three-dimensional design of his fountain.

In the same year he had the ceramic model of his fountain made, Van Doesburg also commissioned the ceramicist Herman Zaalberg (1880–1958) to produce a ceramic garden vase (fig. 7.15), which has since been lost. His collaboration with Zaalberg was motivated by the strong antipathy he felt toward the famous Dutch Nieuwe Kunst ceramicist Willem Coenraad Brouwer (1877–1933).[63] Seeking to aid Zaalberg in his attempt to establish a studio to compete with Brouwer's, Van Doesburg designed the garden vase as a commercial model, and exhibited the design at the Annual Fair for the Decorative Arts (Jaarbeurs voor Kunstnijverheid) held at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam.[64] The garden vase sought to bring the ideas he had explored in the fountain project to a more portable and domestic object. As with the fountain, Van Doesburg used a square at the core of his design. He broke this plane horizontally by allowing the four rectilinear tile bases to extend beyond the square, creating a pinwheel effect. Upon these base tiles he arranged four containers of varying sizes and heights, two of which are vertically oriented and two horizontally. Van Doesburg wrote a short but detailed article

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61. In a letter to J. J. P. Oud, dated May 13, 1918, Van Doesburg insinuated that Van 't Hoff was bothered by his design for the Leeuwarden competition, likely because of the clear formal similarities. Van Straaten, *Theo van Doesburg,* 55.

62. Van Straaten, *Theo van Doesburg,* 54.

63. Zaalberg was a former student of the famous Dutch ceramicist, and eventually opened his own studio, called "De Rijn," in Zoeterwoude in May 1918. Van Straaten, *Theo van Doesburg,* 69. Van Doesburg's antipathy toward Brouwer may have emerged from his work on the De Lange House, for whose façade Brouwer had designed figurative sculptures.

64. Theo van Doesburg, "Moderne Tuinplastiek. (Bloemvaas)" [Modern garden sculpture. (Flower vase)], *Bouwkundig Weekblad* 40, no. 51 (December 1919): 313.

in *Bouwkundig Weekblad* which illustrated his garden vase and clarified his thoughts at the time on modern design objects. The text warrants an extended quotation:

> The realization that the immediate environment of our modern architecture demands plastic forms that clearly express themselves with this architecture harmoniously and in all respects—which can never be the case with the rudimentary forms of earlier styles—creating an increased *sense of responsibility* for pure forms in every area. As opposed to the tasteless baroque remnants of earlier times, we are confronted here with a form that springs from the new sense of style, a form in which it endeavors with seriousness to advance a conviction to make the whole in such a way that it expresses itself *without accident*, without decoration, but only with harmonious proportions. This form, like any *proportional form*, is not meant to please and it may appear even sober at first glance. When considered more carefully, it will, however, express itself rhythmically in space. The four containers, varying in size, position and color, form one rhythmic *whole*, as well as plastic spatial body in itself, as an *image*. Then placed as a vase on a bright green grass surface, filled with *red*, *yellow*, *blue* and *white* flowers, this garden vase gives a surprising effect *to all sides*. [65]

In this passage, Van Doesburg was aggressive in his attacks against past design trends—certainly targeting Brouwer in this case—while at times maintaining a defensive position on the vase's simplicity of form. He reiterated the crucial way in which design objects

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65. "Het besef, dat de onmiddellijke omgeving van onze moderne architectuur naar beeldende vormen vraagt, die zich met deze architectuur harmonisch en in alle opzichten klaar uitspreken,—wat nimmer het geval kan zijn met de rudimentaire vormen van vroegere stijlen,—doet op elk gebied het *verantwoordelijksgevoel* voor zuivere vormen toenemen. Tegenover de smakelooze barokrestantjes van vroegere tijden, staan wij hier tegenover een vorm, die uit het nieuwe stijlgevoel ontspringt, een vorm waarbij er met ernst en overtuiging naar gestreefd is het geheel zóó te maken, dat het uit zich zelf, *zonder bijkomstigheid*, zonder versiering, doch alleen van harmonische verhoudingen uit, beeldt. Deze vorm, als elke *verhoudingsvorm*, wil niet behagen en het kan zijn, dat hij op het eerste gezicht zelfs nuchter aandoet. Bij aandachtiger beschouwen, zal hij zich evenwel rhythmisch in de ruimte uitdrukken. De vier bakken in maat, stand en kleur steeds wisselend, vormen één rhythmisch *geheel*, zoowel als plastisch ruimtelichaam op zichzelf, als *beeld*, dan als vaas op helder groen gras-vlak geplaatst, gevuld *met roode, gele, blauwe en*

must exist in harmony with their architectural setting, while also generating a "rhythmic whole" meant to guide a viewer's experience of such an environment. Yet his description still invoked the language he had used several months earlier when discussing Rietveld's work in the pages of *De Stijl*.

The Rietveld Joint

The language Van Doesburg employed when describing his garden vase in the pages of *Bouwkundig Weekblad*—as simultaneously a three-dimensional "spatial body" as well as an image—echoes his description that accompanied the reproduction of Rietveld's *Armchair* in the pages of *De Stijl,* discussed earlier in this chapter. The furniture maker's experimental works provided Van Doesburg with further examples of an emerging trend in the decorative arts, toward a greater concern with spatial definition and movement. This is evident in the manner in which Rietveld's earlier *Child's Chair* (fig. 7.6) had been presented in *De Stijl*. Unlike the depiction of the *Armchair*—illustrated in the journal several months later—which was photographed from a single angle, the representation of the *Child's Chair* consisted of three separate photographs showing the chair from front, side, and back.[66] Rietveld appears to have sent Van Doesburg the three photographs and insisted on the inclusion of them all. Marijke Küper has remarked on the unusual practice of showing a piece of furniture from three separate views.[67] While atypical, it was not unique: as noted above, Van Doesburg had previously depicted two separate views of

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witte bloemen geeft deze tuinvaas *naar alle zijden* een verrassende werking" (emphasis in the original). Van Doesburg, "Moderne Tuinplastiek," 313.

66. The photographic reproductions were accompanied by an explanatory text by Rietveld. See Rietveld, "Aanteekening bij kinderstoel," 102.

67. Küper, "Gerrit Rietveld," 263.

Van ’t Hoff’s newel post, and likely found a similar motivation in presenting three views of the *Child’s Chair*.[68] As with the newel post, the multiple angles in which the chair was shown encouraged the mental circumnavigation around the chair from back to front that allowed its form to unfurl through time and space.

Rietveld made the high chair for the first-born child of a patron, the Utrecht-based architect and municipal engineer H. G. J. Schelling (1888–1978).[69] His design sought to introduce several practical features into the chair, while refraining from delving into a purely utilitarian design. “Starting from the known requirements,” he wrote, “sitting comfortably and steadily, adjustable high and low, washable, not too heavy and strong, regularity has been sought as a clear representation of the thing itself, without accessories.”[70] The chair consisted of two detachable parts. The lower support could be removed and inverted, serving as a small playpen for the child. The two sets of four rungs thus acted not only as structural supports for the legs, but also as barriers to establish the boundaries of the pen. The seat consisted of four thin boards demarcating the sides of the chair. To prevent the child from falling through the gaps between these boards and the frame of the chair, leather straps were attached to each board by pegs.[71]

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68. Interestingly, a photograph of Van ’t Hoff’s Zomerhuis te Huis ter Heide was illustrated in the same July 1919 issue of *De Stijl*.

69. Rietveld had previously created furniture for the occasion of Schelling’s marriage, as well as a playpen, shortly before completing the high chair. Roman Koot, “Rietveld’s Network in Utrecht,” in *Rietveld’s Universe,* ed. Rob Dettingmeijer, Marie-Thérèse van Thoor, and Ida van Zijl (Rotterdam: NAi, 2011), 53.

70. “Uitgegaan van de bekende eischen: gemakkelijk en vast zitten, hoog en laag stelbaar, afwasbaar, niet te zwaar en sterk, is er getracht naar regelmatigheid als klare beelding van het ding zelf, zonder bijkomstigheden.” Rietveld, “Aanteekening bij Kinderstoel,” 102.

71. Van Zijl, *Gerrit Rietveld*, 30. The straps created a latticework which art historians have observed was evocative of Charles Rennie Mackintosh’s ladder-back chairs designed in 1888 for Hill House. See Küper, “Gerrit Rietveld,” 263.

What distinguished the *Child's Chair,* however, from the designs of other De Stijl artists—Van Doesburg included—was its novel method of construction. The intentionally didactic presentation of three views of the *Child's Chair* was meant to introduce readers to this new process of furniture design and production. The photographs were accompanied by a short text written by Rietveld explaining his method:

> The common peg-and-hole wood connection, where the post accommodates the rail, is still used for almost everything. This connection is also very satisfying when it comes to work, and it is a wonderful sight to see, for example, a set of rails and posts with hole, peg, and groove. However, once the furniture is assembled, one no longer sees any of this very rich connection. . . . The wood connection used here is obvious because of its simplicity and clarity of expression. In addition, it is particularly strong because the wood ends remain in full strength. The peg-and-hole connection takes little time, which is suited to modern work methods. The biggest advantage is that one becomes very free in placing the rails, which express themselves more spatially, so that one is released from the constructively bound surface.[72]

Rietveld's explanatory remarks on the design and creation of the *Child's Chair* provided the first published description of the "Cartesian node," or, more commonly referred to as the "Rietveld joint."[73] As Rietveld explained, his system of wood joinery consisted of a peg-and-hole construction method in which glued dowels would be used to

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72. "De gewone gat-en-pin houtverbinding, waarbij de stijl den regel opvangt, wordt bijna voor alles nog gebruikt. Zij is onder het werk da nook zeer bevredigend en het is een heerlijk gezicht om b.v. een stel regels en stijlen met gat en pen en groef te zien. Wanneer echter eenmaal het meubel in elkaar zit, ziet men van deze zeer dure verbinding niets meer. . . . De hier gebruikte houtverbinding ligt voor de hand door har eenvoud en klaarheid van uitdrukking. Daarbij is zij bijzonder sterk, omdat de houtuiteinden in hin volle kracht blijven. Zij neemt weinig tijd, wat zich aanpast bij de modern arbeidsregelingen. Het grootste voordeel is, dat men zeer vrij wordt in het plaatsen der regels, die zich meer ruimtelijk uitdrukken, waardoor men loskomt van het constructief-gebonden vlak." Rietveld, "Aanteekening bij Kinderstoel," 102.

73. Overy, "Carpentering the Classic," 136.

connect the slats of wood that comprised the chair. The joint differed from that of the more common mortise-and-tenon method, in which the tenon tongue is inserted into a mortise hole carved into the adjoining wood piece, resulting in a seamless joint that forms a right angle.[74] This is clearly visible in the simple, cubic structure of an earlier Arts and Crafts–inspired dinning chair Rietveld made in 1908 (fig. 7.16).[75] Instead, the dowel system facilitates a freer placement of the wooden slats, while enabling the slats to continue past the joinery point, thereby creating the characteristic trifold intersection of the Rietveld joint (fig. 7.17).[76] The *Child's Chair* demonstrates an early stage of Rietveld's dowel system, as the slats of the chair do not yet fully extend beyond one another. Nevertheless, the chair marked a clear shift in practice away from his predecessors working in the tradition of the Arts and Crafts movement, such as Berlage or Klaarhamer (figs. 7.18, 7.19).[77]

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74. Van Zijl, *Gerrit Rietveld*, 30.

75. Vöge, *The Complete Rietveld Furniture*, 44–45.

76. Scholars have sought to explain the origin of Rietveld's use of the dowel system. Carel Blotkamp looked to medieval examples of furniture construction: Carel Blotkamp, "Een Rietveld Meubel van omstreeks 1480," *Jong Holland,* no. 4 (1989), 2–4. Meanwhile, Paul Overy pointed out numerous possible sources for the joint, including a "Rietveld lectern" in Giovanni Bellini's *St. Francis in the Desert* (ca. 1476–78). He argued, though, that there was likely a simpler explanation: "In searching for a new way of approaching the construction of a piece of furniture, Rietveld went back to basic methods of carpentry used in the Middle Ages but still current in the crude vernacular of wooden piers and agricultural implements in the early decades of the twentieth century. From this 'return to first principles' he seems to have believed it would be possible to develop new methods of designing and making furniture appropriate to an age in which electrically driven woodworking machinery and new glues made new methods of production possible in a small workshop as well as in a large factory." See Overy, "Carpentering the Classic," 158.

77. The joint also broke with the Arts and Crafts tradition of exposing joinery. As Kevin P. Rodel and Jonathan Binzen note, "In response to the increasing mechanization of furniture making, the Arts and Crafts movement expounded the importance of hand craftsmanship. To emphasize the point that a piece was made by skilled hands, many Arts and Crafts furniture designers produced furniture with exposed joinery—often the primary embellishment of the piece." See Rodel and Binzen, *Arts & Crafts Furniture*, 12.

The Chair

Rietveld did not arrive at a final version of the joint until late in 1918. For the first time, with his design for the *Armchair*, he allowed the wooden slats that supported the chair to extend beyond their points of intersection. As a result, the slats also protrude beyond the planes of the chair demarcated by the boundaries of the armrests and the legs. For a brief, yet seminal moment, the method came to characterize his furniture design until 1923. The form that the *Armchair* took as a result of the Rietveld joint has been the subject of an outsized amount of critical discussion in the literature on Rietveld specifically, and De Stijl more broadly. From this body of thought, a general consensus has emerged on the chair's significance within De Stijl theory; here I will only briefly summarize the two principal interpretive threads that have informed the present understanding of Rietveld's *Armchair*.

The first addressed the chair in ontological terms. In this discourse, Rietveld's design, or more its appearance, has been discussed as a deconstructive event: a chair stripped of all of its superfluous elements. The stripped-down appearance of the *Armchair* was contextualized within De Stijl's mission to reduce and refine all media of artistic practice into their basic elements, in preparation for their eventual synthesis in a future De Stijl environment. The Rietveld joint, scholars emphasize, was central to this process because the joint not only gave the appearance of being a reductive element in the chair's form, but also preserved the independence of each individual wooden slat. Unlike the mortise-and-tenon joint, which unified two pieces of wood, the slats of the Rietveld joint extend beyond their joinery points, thereby preserving their independent forms. Drawing on the work of Yve-Alain Bois, Michael White made this point by

analyzing a letter Rietveld drafted for the editor of the journal *Bouwen*. He observed, "Rietveld discusses in detail a wood joint and repeats over and over again the importance of *verbinding* (joining) to him. The fixing he describes is his now famous crossing joint where elements extend past the point of junction. . . . This novel fixing allowed each structural element to preserve a separate visual identity while clearly expressing its dependency on its neighbors."[78] Rietveld himself spoke of the chair in similar terms: "With this chair an attempt has been made to have every part simple and in its most elementary form according to its function and material, the form, thus, which is most capable of being harmonized with the whole. The construction is attuned to the parts to ensure that no part dominates or is subordinate to the others, so the whole appears above all free and clear in space. . . ."[79] The Rietveld joint, and the chair constructed from it, thus can be understood as a paradigm of the collective and collaborative model at the core of De Stijl thinking which links the individual part to a broader whole.

The second interpretive framework situated the chair within a discourse on spatiality, which focused on the relationship between Rietveld's furniture and architecture. Once again, the Rietveld joint receives particular focus because the intersecting wooden slats allow one to see through the chair as well, as if viewing all of

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78. The undated letter was intended for a Mr. Van Meurs and likely written in the spring of 1926. Translated and quoted in White, *De Stijl and Dutch Modernism*, 1–2 (see chap. 1, n. 25). Michael White frames his interpretation on Yve-Alain Bois's notion of the "De Stijl idea" and its two critical elements of "elementarization" and "integration." See also Yve-Alain Bois, "The De Stijl Idea," in *Painting as Model*, 101–21 (see chap. 2, n. 7).

79. "Bij deze stoel is getracht, elk onderdeel enkelvoudig te doen zijn en wel in den meest oorspronkelijken vorm naar en aard van gebruik en material, den vorm, die het meest ontvankelijk is om door verhouding in harmonie te komen met het overage. De constructive werkt mee om de onderdeelen onverminkt onderling te verbinden, zóó dat het eene het andere zoo min mogelijk over heerschend bedekt of aan zich ondergeschikt maakt, opdat het geheel vooral vrij en helder in de ruimte staat . . . ." Written by Rietveld and quoted in Van Doesburg, "Aanteekeningen bij een Leunstoel van Rietveld," n.p. (see n. 15 above).

its component parts.[80] Marijke Küper and Ida van Zijl, for example, describe the chair as "a harmonious spatial composition," and, drawing upon Rietveld's correspondence, observe that "the aim was to make a piece of furniture without any mass or volume, that did not enclose space, but allowed it to continue uninterrupted."[81] This spatial understanding of the *Armchair* allowed scholars to situate the piece of furniture within the antiarchitectural vein shared among several De Stijl members. Van Doesburg's enthusiasm for Rietveld's designs certainly stemmed in part from these sentiments. He explicitly mentions the open spatial nature of the furniture maker's work in a Dadaist poem about Rietveld's *Upright Chair* (1919; fig. 7.20):

> Rietveld's chair: unintentional, but dispassionate processing of open spaces with contrast:
>
> **NECCESSITY**
>
> **SITTING**
>
> **CHAIR**
>
> Material limitation versus abundance, undisguised and permanent representation of open spaces.
>
> **CHAIR**
>
> silent eloquence like a machine.[82]

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80. The original design for the *Armchair* included asymmetrical pentagonal side panels which obscured such a view through the chair. These were removed from the design, however, not long afterwards.

81. Küper and Van Zijn, *Gerrit Rietveld,* 74.

82. "Rietvelds stoel: onopzettelijke, maar onmeêdoogende verwerking van open ruimten
Met als contrast:
NOODZAAK

Rietveld's furniture emerged as an example of an opening of spatial boundaries, and could be set in opposition to the closed nature of architecture—an opposition established by Van der Leck in his 1917 essay "The Place of Modern Painting in Architecture."[83] These two main interpretive threads of the furniture Rietveld produced between 1918 and 1923 have become entrenched, with good reason. They encapsulate how his furniture intersects two of the central theoretical tenets that emerged during the formative years of De Stijl. Yet such established interpretative models have overlooked several aspects of Rietveld's furniture which, I believe, warrant further discussion.

Modernism on the Recline

Notably absent in the literature on Rietveld's oeuvre, and regarding the *Armchair* specifically, has been a discussion of the place of these pieces of furniture in the history of design. For example, while the stylistic origins of the *Armchair*'s form have been traced to already mentioned figures including Wright, Berlage, Klaarhamer, and Mackintosh, little consideration has been given to the fact that this chair, which came to function as the paradigm of De Stijl design, was specifically a *reclining* armchair.[84] By

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ZITTEN

STOEL

Materiele beperking tegenover rijke, onverholen en vaste beelding van open ruimten

STOEL

Stomme welsprekendheid als van een machine."

Theo van Doesburg, "Schilderkunst van Giorgio de Chirico en een stoel van Rietveld," *De Stijl* 3, no. 5 (March 1920): 46. The poem was responding to a painting by Giorgio de Chirico and a dining chair by Rietveld illustrated in *De Stijl.*

83. Van der Leck, "De Plaats van het Moderne Schilderen," 6–7 (see chap. 3, n. 43).

84. Extensive research into such stylistic precedents has already been conducted. For an overview, see Küper, "Gerrit Rietveld," 263–65. See also Baroni, *Furniture of Gerrit Thomas Rietveld*, 34–41.

the opening decades of the twentieth century, the modern reclining chair had come to symbolize a number of entrenched social, cultural, and economic values that had been established over the course of the previous century and a half.[85] First, over this period the reclining chair became an object signifying leisure. As the rapidly expanding bourgeoisie throughout Europe sought refuge from the speed and stress of a modern, industrializing society, the reclining chair offered a place of comfort and ease.[86] Within the boundaries of the domestic sphere, the form of leisure the reclined chair offered was, however, decidedly gendered male. Clive Edwards has succinctly described this dynamic in the following way:

> The social codes attached to room use, the characteristics of furniture within those rooms, and the more precisely defined role of women as arbiters of morals and manners as well as their restrictive public dress, excluded them from reclining in "polite society" and ensured that they used reclining chairs only in private quarters. The particularly masculine connotations of reclining chairs during most of the nineteenth century reflected the widely accepted view in middle-class

85. Reclining chairs emerged first during the sixteenth century, notably in France and the Netherlands, and gained further popularity in the eighteenth century. For example, in the doll house of art collector Sara Rothé (1699–1751)—located in the collection of the Gemeentemuseum, The Hague—there is to be found a miniature reclining chair in the reading room. For a thorough summary of the history of the reclining chair, see Clive Edwards, "Chairs Surveyed: Health, Comfort, and Fashion in Evolving Markets," *Studies in the Decorative Arts* 6, no. 1 (Fall-Winter 1998–99): 32–67.

86. Siegfried Giedion would argue that the recliner emerged in order to support the new posture of relaxation that emerged in the nineteenth century: "The posture of the nineteenth century . . . is based on relaxation. This relaxation is found in a free, unposed attitude that can be called neither sitting nor lying." Quoted in Margaret Campbell, "From Cure Chair to *Chaise Longue:* Medical Treatment and the Form of the Modern Recliner," *Journal of Design History* 12, no. 4 (1999): 328. Adrian Forty objected to Giedion's "functionalist" interpretation, which ignores the social and economic motivations that stimulated the rise in popularity of reclining chairs in the nineteenth century. See Adrian Forty, *Objects of Desire: Design and Society Since 1750* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1986), 91–93.

> households that the husband was entitled to "put his feet up" in a reclining chair after a day at work.[87]

The adjustable, reclining *Morris Chair* (fig. 7.21), intended to provide such relief for wealthy businessmen and merchants, addressed this need directly. The popular chair, designed by Philip Webb (1831–1915) in 1866, spawned numerous derivatives well into the twentieth century. Designers before and after World War I reinforced the already masculinized nature of the reclining chair through rationalist metaphors of the machine aesthetic, for example Josef Hoffmann's (1870–1956) *Sitzmaschine Chair* (c. 1905; fig. 7.22) or Marcel Breuer's (1902–81) *Club Chair* (1927–28; fig. 7.23).

In addition to acting as a signifier of masculine leisure, the rise in popularity of the reclining chair during the nineteenth century was intrinsically tied to broader concerns about public health. Margret Campbell has traced the influence of medical attitudes toward hygiene broadly, and the treatment of pulmonary tuberculosis specifically, on the design and perception of reclining chairs well into the twentieth century.[88] The therapeutic associations of the reclining position gained increased significance in the years following World War I. During this time, the body, particularly the healthy body, received acute attention in the traumatic wake of the mass casualties of the war and the devastating effect of the Spanish flu epidemic which emerged in the years that followed.[89] Widespread throughout the growing number of sanatoriums in Europe, the reclining chair also became a tool for creating the appearance of the sanitary nature of

87. Edwards, "Chairs Surveyed," 35.
88. Campbell, "Cure Chair to *Chaise Longue,*" 327–43.
89. Campbell, "Cure Chair to *Chaise Longue,"* 334–39.

modern interiors, and was employed by many modernist designers in their endeavor to convey the sense of a healthy environment.

Rietveld's *Armchair* existed within this matrix of signification that had grown around the reclining chair over the previous 150 years. The chair's distilled structure, stripped of any upholstery, lent an appearance of medical sterility—a sanitized look that the chair shared with Hoffmann's *Sitzmaschine*, which was initially intended for the Westend spa sanatorium at Pukersdorf, outside of Vienna.[90] In addition, the *Armchair* existed within the traditionally masculine framework of domestic life. This was furthered by the chair's reliance upon geometric forms to impart a sense of rational design, long affiliated with masculinized tropes in interior design, as discussed in chapter 5. This was reinforced by the perceived mechanized process by which his furniture was made.[91] It should be little surprise, then, that that the chair appealed to Rietveld's clientele, which comprised mostly progressive members of Utrecht's upper middle class, including manufacturers, architects, and doctors.[92] For example, the suite of furniture commissioned by architect Piet Elling (1897–1963)—an armchair, upright chair, and buffet—for his home (fig. 7.24) retained, and to an extent strengthened, the traditional structures of domestic living, though shrouding them behind a modernist abstract form.[93]

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90. Campbell, "Cure Chair to *Chaise Longue,"* 335.

91. The perceived mechanized production of the chair belied the fact that it was very much a craft object. This subject will be discussed in further detail below.

92. For a detailed summary of Rietveld's patrons, see Roman Koot, "Rietveld's Network in Utrecht," 51–63.

93. In spite of the introduction of progressive designs and the attempts to enact a fundamental leveling of social and economic difference, De Stijl's interior designs retained the basic structure of the domestic space from the previous century. They did not—unlike Alexandr Rodchenko's design for the *Worker's Club,* exhibited at the 1925 International Exhibition of Decorative Arts and Modern Industry—aim to reshape the very nature of how individuals interacted with one

It was for this reason that Van Doesburg would have taken a great interest in Rietveld's furniture designs, and the *Armchair* specifically. His furniture encapsulated De Stijl's concerns with contemporary discourses on masculinity, mechanization, and health, all of which overlapped in their aim to produce a modern aesthetic environment.

Against Gravity

When Van Doesburg "discovered" the work Rietveld was undertaking independent of De Stijl, he found in his designs objects that could better illustrate and advance his own particular theorization of the relationship between furniture and architecture. Between 1919 and 1920, Van Doesburg relied on the furniture maker to furnish several of his interior designs. This was likely because the asymmetrical formal devices employed in the work of Wils or Van 't Hoff —although supporting his interest in cubist-inspired perspective and motion—did not alter the architectural dynamics that remained at the heart of these works. As discussed in previous chapters, perhaps *the* core tenet of De Stijl was the transcendent power of aesthetics to revitalize a putatively declining European culture and enable a "new man" to engage the challenges of a modern world. As such, De Stijl members recognized a need, at least in theory, to suspend the fundamentally utilitarian dynamic of load and support that, according to Schopenhauer, prevented architecture from existing as a truly aesthetic space. This was manifested in the pivotal role played by color in the interior—to be discussed further below— as well as in the

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another. This emphasis on aesthetic, rather than a structural social change, led the Hungarian critic Ernő Kállai to attack Van Doesburg: "We are aware that constructivism is increasingly developing bourgeois traits. One manifestation of this is the Dutch Stijl group's constructive (mechanized) aestheticism. . . ." Ernő Kállai et al., "Manifesto," in *Between Worlds: A Sourcebook of Central European Avantgardes, 1910–1930*, ed. Timothy O. Benson and Éva

"opening up" of furniture in order to counter the enclosing nature of architecture. Scholars have focused on the light and transparent qualities of Rietveld's designs, yet too often ignored has been the antigravitational, and thus antifunctional, illusionism apparent in his furniture. Indeed, it was precisely this illusionism that differentiated Rietveld's designs from those of other De Stijl adherents, especially Jan Wils.

This effect is most evident in the latticework of slats that form the support for Rietveld's *Armchair*. Because the dowel system of the Rietveld joint makes the supporting structure of the chair invisible, the slats of the chair appear to hover next to and extend past one another, rather than providing any direct support. Rietveld used this effect to reinforce the antigravitational appearance of his furniture. The chair's seat, for example, is supported by two slats: one connected to the sides of the front legs, and the other to the two pieces of wood that fall from the armrests. These supportive slats, however, are not propped up by any additional slats of wood from beneath. The result is a sense that the seat is floating. A similar optical effect is at play in the chair's armrests, each of which is supported by two vertical pieces of wood in what appears to be a post and lintel support. The backs of the armrests are held up by the chair's legs. Descending from the center of each armrest, however, is a piece of wood that falls past the lower rung and stops just short of the floor, making it appear to float. This juxtaposition of the two armrest supports creates a playful equivocation among elements of the chair, obfuscating which elements are in fact structural and which ones are not.

Forgács (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002), 443. (Originally published as "Nyilatkozat," *Egység*, no. 4 [1923].)

The antigravitational impression of Rietveld's chair was continued in, and possibly most successfully encapsulated by, his design for a hanging lamp, first made for the office of the Maarssen-based physician A. M. Hartog in 1922 (fig. 7.25).[94] The fixture consisted of four tubular opal light bulbs, each twenty-nine centimeters in length, and each was capped on either end by black wooden cubes that hid the bayonet mounts into which the bulbs were fitted.[95] Electrical wires were attached to these cubic end pieces, which tethered the bulbs to a square mount on the ceiling. For the Hartog office, Rietveld arranged the bulbs of the lamp in a manner that echoed the joinery employed in his furniture. Two vertically oriented bulbs served as a central pole, around which he arranged two horizontal bulbs. The lower horizontal bulb was set parallel to the plane created by the two vertical bulbs, while the upper bulb is perpendicular to it. Suspended freely by wire, each bulb of the light fixture was able to sway, introducing movement to the piece that would have reinforced the lamp's sense of weightlessness.

The importance of creating such an antigravitational effect explains Rietveld's development away from the rectilinear slats of his *Armchair* and toward the planar furniture he produced in 1923. In his *Berlin Chair* (fig. 7.26), for example, the structural stability of the chair is problematized by a system of optical equivocation similar to that which he had employed in the earlier *Armchair*. In the *Berlin Chair*, the black wooden slat that supports the dark gray chair seat simultaneously passes in front of the white wooden plane supporting the armrest on the left. Yet on the right, it passes behind the

94. Vöge, *Complete Rietveld Furniture,* 56–57.

95. Dietrich Neuman, "Artificial Lighting as a Design Task for the Modern Architect," in Dettingmeijer et al., *Rietveld's Universe*, 189. For an additional overview of the development of electric lighting, see Dominic Bradbury, "Lighting," in *Essential Modernism: Design between the World Wars* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018), 112–56.

white slat that supports the light-gray side panel of the chair. These formal illusions occur at the back of the chair as well. The white slat supporting the back of the black armrest runs along the backrest of the chair, only to terminate at the light-gray side panel, itself seemingly unsupported by any wooden slat. Uncertain whether one element is supporting another, a viewer reads the chair as a collection of floating planes. Here, Rietveld employed a different strategy from his design for an *End Table* dating to the same year (fig. 7.27). This work relies heavily on the use of cantilevering to give the table's top a sense of weightlessness and asymmetry, calling into question the stability, and thus the functionality, of the table itself. By creating a visual paradox within the system of load and support in the structure of his furniture, Rietveld complicated the legibility of his furniture as functional objects. This was the prophetic quality that Van Doesburg identified when discussing Rietveld's work. The inherent equivalence in the structure of furniture and architecture allowed the De Stijl editor to use Rietveld's designs as a model of antifunctionalism that could be extended to the built environment at large. The furniture maker's work foreshadowed the "future interior," one that elevates the mundane and utilitarian to the transcendent and aesthetic.

A Modern Surfacescape

The immediacy of decorative objects and their very centrality to lived experience placed them at the center of De Stijl's aim to transform the interior into a transcendent aesthetic space. This objective did not derive solely from the *form* that these chairs and tables took. Rather, it was crucially reliant on the surfaces of these furnishings as well. Jonathan Hay has drawn renewed attention to the inherently intertwined dynamics between the form of decorative objects—what he labels their "object-body"—and their surface, the

topography of which he describes as their "surfacescape."[96] An interaction with a decorative object, such as a chair, ebbs and flows between the perception of the utilitarian nature and structure of its object-body and the sensual consumption of the design and materiality of the chair's surfacescape. The surfacescape thus plays an important role in the signifying power of decorative objects.

During the middle of the nineteenth century, there emerged a sense that the ordering system of cultural, material, and social values that imbued the surfacescape of decorative objects was rapidly coming undone. Manufactured by novel methods of production that harnessed recently discovered materials—either through scientific means or colonialist expansion—many of these objects imitated luxury goods and were offered as affordable alternatives to their more expensive paragons. The emergence of such simulacra unmoored the system of values intrinsic to the conveyance of material and cultural capital. This uncertainty, spurred by the decoupling of the external surface of decorative objects from their materiality and method of production, was an important factor that motivated the De Stijl group's fixation on the disappearance of truth behind a world of appearances. Piet Mondrian, for example, made this issue a point of focus in his aesthetic theories, which he formally introduced in the serialized essay "The Nieuwe

96. He wrote, "As object-bodies, three dimensional decorative objects operate at the boundary between functional purpose and plastic form—that is, between a formal economy of utilitarian use and sculptural presence. The bodily aspect of the decorative object, therefore, essential as it is to the object's existence and operation, is not what makes it most distinctively part of the world of decoration. The existence of two-dimensional decorative objects—textiles, paintings hanging panels—which, being all surface, are only minimally object-bodies, suggests that the specifically decorative aspect of the object lies elsewhere, in the surface. A topography of sensuous surface—a *surfacescape*—is the principal feature shared by two-dimensional and three-dimensional decorative objects. Moreover, as important as volume, mass and trajectory are in our transactions with the latter, we get to know their object-bodies simultaneously through their surfacescapes, for directed attention to individual artefacts is unable to separate the object's shape and materiality

Beelding in Painting." First appearing in the inaugural issues of *De Stijl*, the text was a seminal treatise for the group. In it, Mondrian argued, "Outward life must evolve into *abstract real life* if it is to achieve unity. Today it forms the transition from the old to the new."[97] Van Doesburg echoed Mondrian's anxiety surrounding the instability of materiality and its relation to vision and truth: "*It is not our era which is falling apart, but it is just the past, the old culture, the pseudo-culture, which was founded on emotion, faith and nuance*; the past which produced an art with pseudo-light, pseudo-warmth (in painting this was warmth from three-quarters lapis lazuli, madder, umber, burnt sienna), pseudo-depth, pseudo-sublimity, pseudo-profundity, and pseudo-sensitivity; a culture which as a result ends in one big scaffold."[98]

Mondrian's solution—adopted, at least in theory, as a core dogma of De Stijl—involved the distillation of pictorial representation into a basic set of units he called "plastic means."[99] Of crucial significance, these formal elements remained decidedly neo-Platonic in conception, as their ideal application eschewed any explicit concern for the material composition of a work of art, architecture, or design. This exclusion of

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from its visible surface." Jonathan Hay, *Sensuous Surfaces: The Decorative Object in Early Modern China* (London: Reaktion Books, 2010), 67.

97. Piet Mondrian, The Nieuwe Beelding in Painting: IX; From the Natural to the Abstract, i.e. from the Undetermined to the Determined," in *The New Art—The New Life: The Collected Writings of Piet Mondrian,* ed. and trans. Harry Holtzman and Martin S. James (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1986), 57. (Originally published as "De Nieuwe Beelding in de Schilderkunst: IX. Van het Natuurlijk tot het Abstracte, d. i. van het Onbepaalde tot het Bepaalde," *De Stijl* 1, no. 11 [September 1918]: 125.)

98. "*Het is niet deze tijd die uiteenvalt, maar het is juist de oude tijd, de oude kultuur, de schijnkultuur, welke op emotie, geloof en nuance gegrondvest was;* de oude tijd, welke een kunst voorbarcht met schijnlicht, schinwarmte (in de schilderkunst was deze warmte voor driekwat lapus lazuli, kraplak, omber, gebrande terra sienna) schindiepte, schinverhevenheid, schijninnigheid en schijngevoeligheid, een kultuur die als resultaat eindigt in één groot schavot" (emphasis in the original). Theo van Doesburg, "Antwoord aan Mejuffrouw Edith Pijpers," 68 (see chap. 1, n. 43)

materiality from De Stijl aesthetics was intended to appeal to the increasingly dematerialized and abstracted nature of modern life. Mondrian wrote, "Although the man of truly modern culture lives within concrete reality, *his mind transforms this reality into abstractions, and he extends his real life into the abstract—so that he once again realizes this abstraction.*"[100] Color was essential to this process of abstraction. It was marshaled to create a new surfacescape that could counteract the loss of material certainty that defined the modern experience. In this way, De Stijl's emphasis on color upended the various approaches taken by its prewar predecessors and postwar contemporaries. By enveloping the surface of decorative objects in color, the group sought to eliminate the question of materiality entirely, sidestepping the fundamental problem Semper had vocalized a half a century before—as discussed in chapter 3—regarding fabricated materials' belying the true nature of the decorative object's surfacescape.

Importantly, De Stijl theorized color not as a material thing to be applied to the surface—this was purely the role of paint. "Paint and color are two different things," Van Doesburg emphasized. "Paint is a means, color an end."[101] Color, rather, was conceived as a state in which the materiality of an object would be superseded. By replacing the material quality of the object with the immateriality of color, De Stijl artists sought to eliminate the theoretical divide between object-body and surfacescape. This conceptualization of color enabled members of the group to explore inexpensive materials upon which color was applied. Such was the case with the collaboration

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99. Mondrian, "The Nieuwe Beelding in Painting," 39.

100. Mondrian, "The Nieuwe Beelding in Painting," 43.

101. "Verf en kleur zijn twee verschillende dingen. Verf is middel, kleur is doel." Theo van Doesburg, "De Beteekenis van de kleur in binnen- en buitenarchitectuur" [The meaning of color in interior and exterior architecture], *Bouwkundig Weekblad* 44, no. 21 (May 1923): 233.

undertaken by Huszar and Klaarhamer in 1918 to design furniture for the children's bedroom in the home of Cornelis Bruynzeel Jr., discussed in chapter 4. Klaarhamer was commissioned by Bruynzeel to produce two beds, two chairs, a dresser, a bidet, and a bedside cupboard. These pieces of furniture were initially made of unpainted oak.[102] The oak furniture, however, was destroyed in a fire at Bruynzeel's wood manufacturing plant.[103] The decision was made to remake the furniture and to do so not in the more expensive oak, but in less expensive poplar. To mask the cheaper wood, the decision was made to paint the new suite of furniture, for which Huszar provided the color schemes.[104] For each piece, he conceived of differing combinations of burgundy and black, coating them in a thick layer of semigloss paint (figs 7.28, 7.29). The paint not only covered the wood, but it was also applied—in the case of the dresser and bedside table—to the door hinges, masking the materials of both wood and metal.

Rietveld was guided by a similar motivation as he began to explore the introduction of color into his furniture designs the same year. Although the *Red/Blue Chair* is ubiquitously cited in discussions of his production of chromatic furniture, his experiments with color began with his *Child's Chair*, which, as previously discussed, was the first piece of his furniture to be published in *De Stijl*. Because it was reproduced in black and white, Rietveld made certain to highlight the chair's color: "The wood is green, the straps are red, the pins that hold the straps in the holes of the boards are light green. A

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102. Marijke Küper and Monique Teunissen, *Piet Klaarhamer: Architect en meubleontwerper* (Rotterdam: Nai 010, 2014), 120.

103. Ex and Hoek, *Vilmos Huszar*, 60 (see chap. 3, n. 135).

104. Klaarhamer objected to the application of paint, writing to Bruynzeel: "There is not enough paint for that. Cabinets do not suffer as much, but the edges of the chairs and chest of drawers become bare" [Er is geen verf genoeg daarvoor. Kasten hebben niet zoveel te lijden maar de

red leather cushion can hang from the top line of the backboard."[105] The following year, he painted a dining chair and table white for the interior Van Doesburg designed for Bart de Ligt's home in Katwijk (fig. 4.21, p. 140).[106] Although these early examples of Rietveld's use of paint were infrequent, during this period it was common for him to alter the color of the wood—predominantly beech for his armchairs—with different stains.[107] Around 1922, however, Rietveld began more regularly to paint his furniture. He did this for a version of the *Child's Chair* done in primary colors (fig. 7.30) for the daughter of the architect Willem Witteveen (1891–1979), as well as for the suite of furniture made for the Hartog office (figs. 7.25, 7.31).[108] It was not until 1923, though, that Rietveld began to paint his furniture consistently.

Rietveld's progression toward the regular application of color to his furniture developed from a fusion of his own ideas on manufacturing with De Stijl aesthetic theories. Rietveld's training as a craftsman in his father's workshop, coupled with his enrollment in evening classes at The Utrecht Museum of Applied Arts (Het Utrechtsch Museum van Kunstnijverheid), left the furniture maker with a strong grasp of design history and techniques.[109] Yet in his father's practice, which specialized in reproduction

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randen van de stoelen en ladenkasten worden kaal]. Reproduced in Küper and Teunissen, *Piet Klaarhamer*, 120–21.

105. "Het hout is groen, de riempjes zijn rood, de pennetjes, die de riempjes in de gaatjes der plankjes gekneld houden, zijn lichtgroen. Een rood-leeren kussentje kan vanaf het bovenregeltje van de rugplank hangen." Rietveld, "Aanteekening bij kinderstoel," 102.

106. Vöge, *Complete Rietveld Furniture,* 52–53.

107. Küper and Van Zijl, *Gerrit Rietveld,* 75.

108. Van Zijl, *Gerrit Rietveld*, 28–30.

109. Van Zijl, *Gerrit Rietveld*, 19–20. Although written in 1927, the following passage illustrates this further: "It seems just as wrong to me to accept or reject constructional forms for aesthetic reasons as to accept or reject aesthetic elements on constructional or economic grounds. It is frequently difficult to decide whether an element introduced on apparently aesthetic grounds does in fact offend against the more essentially constructional aspect. This explains why the uninitiated

furniture, he was also exposed to the modernization of manufacturing enabled by the greater availability of machine technologies. The shop incorporated machine and craft methods to construct its products more efficiently. As Paul Overy noted, "Rietveld began to make his early experimental furniture at a time when machine methods of wood cutting were being introduced in Holland and the age-old methods and traditions of the craftsman were being challenged."[110]

Caught in this liminal stage of manufacturing, Rietveld maintained craft ideals while adopting progressive techniques. He used standard sizes of milled wood for the slats, with the dimensions of 2.5 × 2.6 centimeters (although the sizes of the slats varied). This was coupled with the employment of less expensive, manufactured materials, such as plywood. Because of its composition of multiple perpendicularly oriented layers of laminations and adhesive joints, the manufactured wood prevented the warping that occurred with comparably inexpensive softer woods.[111] These manufacturing processes

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sometimes find it difficult to understand why decorative elements are the result of purely technical considerations current at the time of manufacture; in chairs dating from the time of Louis XV, for instance, the curvature of the wood is explained by the fact that it was cut with a bow-saw, which tended to produce a slightly curved line rather than a completely straight one, and by the fact that the grain of most wood is slightly askew. A leg or length of wood which was slightly curved was more easily smoothed and hollowed with a gouge (a concave-bladed chisel), than with a file or scraper. The hollow profile of the leg was often best interrupted at the joints by a little ornamental work, because of the different directions of the grain of the various sections; the addition of a little scroll or rosette in the context of the sober curving lines of the chair give an effect of gracefulness which looks as though it had been dictated by totally aesthetic considerations, rather than by a necessary constructional consideration. This is why the so-called cushion-panels and hollow profiles on the doors of Dutch Renaissance cupboards are in fact quite necessary—to protect its half-inch thick panels against warping." Gerrit Rietveld, "Utility, Construction: (Beauty, Art)," in *Form and Function: A Source Book for the History of Architecture and Design, 1890–1939,* ed. Tim and Charlotte Benton and Dennis Sharp (London: Crosby Lockwood Staples, 1975), 162–63. (Originally published as "Nut, constructie: (schoonheid: kunst)" *i10* 1, no. 3 [1927]: 89–92.)

110. Overy, "Carpentering the Classic," 157, n. 70.

111. W. Owen Harrod, "Unfamiliar Precedents: Plywood Furniture in Weimar Germany," *Studies in the Decorative Arts* 15, no. 2 (Spring–Summer 2008): 3.

and materials were not merely meant to make his works more affordable. Rietveld, like his Arts and Crafts predecessors, sought to impart a sense of dignity and joy to the manufacturing process. He stated this explicitly in reference to the Rietveld joint in the instructive text that accompanied the reproduction of the *Child's Chair*:

> The common peg-and-hole wood connection, where the post accommodates the rail, is still used for almost everything. This connection is also very satisfying when it comes to work, and it is a wonderful sight to see, for example, a set of rails and posts with hole, peg and groove. . . . [The peg-and-hole connection] takes little time, which is suited to modern work methods.[112]

The manufacturing process of the chair, aided by machines, was intended to alleviate the burdens of the labor-intensive aspects of furniture making, enabling a greater joy to be found in the assembly of the chair.

Nevertheless, this process of mechanization was only partial, and each piece of furniture retained a mark of handcraftsmanship. This is evident in an early example of a *Red/Blue Chair*, which likely dates to 1923, in the collection of the Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Museum of Design (fig. 7.32). The dowels used to connect the chair are octagonal in shape, rather than cylindrical, because they could not be machine-cut. As a result, the parts had to be shaped down by hand from a rectilinear piece of wood. This was coupled with the visible presence of a range of tool marks around the adjoining wooden slats of the chair. The surfaces of the *Red/Blue Chair* were painted in shades of primary colors: the backrest in light red, the seat in dark blue, the struts in black, and their

112. "De gewone gat-en-pin houtverbinding, waarbij de stijl den regel opvangt, wordt bijna voor alles nog gebruikt. Zij is onder het werk da nook zeer bevredigend en het is een heerlijk gezicht om b.v. een stel regels en stijlen met gat en pen en groef te zien. . . . Zij neemt weinig tijd, wat zich aanpast bij de modern arbeidsregelingen." Rietveld, "Aanteekening bij Kinderstoel," 102.

ends in a cream yellow.[113] While heralded by scholars retrospectively as the physical manifestation of a Mondrian painting in three-dimensional form, the primary colors of the *Red/Blue Chair* were, as Overy has discussed, not sacred.[114] Rietveld readily provided different colored versions of the armchair, including a pink and sea-green chair made for the Dutch artist Charley Toorop (1891–1955), a white version of the chair for poet Til Brugman (1888–1958), and a black and white chair for Paul Citroen (1896–1983).[115] The importance of introducing color to this model of chair was not explicitly its compliance with the dogmatic aesthetics laid out by Mondrian—as has been seen in the preceding chapters, De Stijl members followed such principles infrequently. Rather, it was Rietveld's use of color in and of itself that was significant, because it masked the differing strategies of the chair's production, unifying them behind a chromatic surface. This is further emphasized in the Cooper Hewitt chair, in which a layer of primer was probably used to fill the gaps in the wood grain, ensuring a smooth finish once the color was applied.[116]

The dematerialization of the chair's surfacescape through the application of color enabled Rietveld to market the chair to both working-class and wealthier middle-class clients. A price list in the Rietveld Schröder Archives illustrates this point (fig. 7.33). The

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113. The chair has been repainted, as have most surviving *Red/Blue Chairs* dating from this period. Unmodulated primary colors were used for the single layer of overpaint. Thanks to Yao-Fen You and Cindy Trope for allowing me to view the files on the *Red/Blue Chair* in the collection of the Cooper Hewitt. The information was gleaned from the object file on the *Red/Blue Chair*, Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Museum of Design, 2019.

114. Paul Overy, "Gerrit Rietveld: Furniture and Meaning," in *2D/3D: Art and Craft Made and Designed for the Twentieth Century,* ed. Tony Knipe and John Millard (Sunderland: Northern Centre for Contemporary Art, 1987), 50.

115. Küper and Van Zijl, *Gerrit Rietveld*, 78.

116. See the object file on the *Red/Blue Chair*, Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Museum of Design, 2019.

list accompanied a model room staged with a suite of Rietveld furniture on display at the "Exhibition of the Ideal Home" held in 1923 (fig. 7.34).[117] From armchair to hanging lamp, the price list illustrated each model of furniture with abstract, two-dimensional distillations of the object's form drawn in colored crayon. Two versions of the *Red/Blue Chair* are offered for sale, however, each commanding a different price. The "inexpensive version" likely referred to those chairs produced in small batches from less expensive soft woods and plywood. The "finer version" would have referred to made-to-order versions that would presumably have used more expensive hardwoods.[118] Yet in spite of these material differences, the visual effect of the two chairs was not intended to be noticeably different. In fact, both chairs are represented by identical drawings, consisting of a single slanted red line for the backrest, a blue line for the seat, and three black lines for the legs and rungs of the chair. In this way, Rietveld decoupled appearance from value, although unlike the attempts to make affordable knock-offs during the previous century, in which imitative processes and materials were pivotal, Rietveld's approach subverted this dynamic by replacing the process of imitation with one of masking. This dematerialization of the surface, at least in appearance, enabled the furniture maker's designs to retain their aesthetic form while allowing them to be both accessible and appealing to both working- and middle-class clients.

The Unified Chromatic Objectscape

The utility of color in De Stijl's practice extended beyond recoding the surfacescape of decorative objects. Around the turn of the twentieth century a vigorous debate was

117. Paul Overy, "Introduction," in Vöge, *Complete Rietveld Furniture,*14.
118. Overy, "Carpentering the Classic," 136.

underway regarding the nature and form the built environment should take in response to the conditions of a rapidly modernizing Europe. As discussed at the outset of this chapter, decorative objects had taken on an increasingly central theoretical position within this discourse. As objects came to bear greater symbolic weight within the interior, critical attention focused more on the relationship between what Hay described as the *objectscape*, or "the topography of an object landscape," and that of the enveloping surfacescape of the architectural enclosure.[119] Establishing a coherent relationship between the objectscape of the room and the enveloping framework of architecture became a central point of concern, as such a unity could reestablish a coherence within the built environment that had been lost in the face of urban upheaval and industrial transformation over the past century.

In these debates, De Stijl artists sought to define a new position, one that maintained an aesthetic unity within the interior, but did not forfeit all control to the single force of the architect. A faction of De Stijl members sought to rectify the imbalance in power awarded to architects not merely practically, but theoretically as well. Since the middle of the nineteenth century, as reviewed in chapter 3, it had been the architect-cum-theorist who was at the forefront in establishing a modern discourse on both architecture and the decorative arts. De Stijl's response to this perceived dominance was the idea of collaboration, a concept that drew upon a romanticized, socialist understanding of the structure of medieval guilds. Van Doesburg articulated this directly in his 1918 essay, "Notes on Monumental Art":

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119. Hay, *Sensuous Surfaces*, 273.

> The new plastic consciousness means: the collaboration of all the plastic arts in order to achieve a pure monumental style on the basis of a *balanced relationship*. A monumental style means: the proportional division of labor among the various arts. A proportional division of labor means that each artist restricts himself to his own area. This limitation means: achieving the plastic with each art's own means. . . . These theories have long been proclaimed by important architects, but in practice, with few exceptions, the old ways remain: the architect takes the role of the painter and sculptor, which naturally leads to the most arbitrary results, as, for example, to a pictorial, sculptural, in a word, *destructive architecture*. Each art—architecture, painting, and sculpture—requires the whole man. Only when this is again realized, just as in antiquity, will there be any development in the direction of a monumental architecture, or style. Then the concept of applied art will automatically disappear, as will any subordination of one art to another.[120]

Nancy Troy has argued that this collaborative leveling of the arts was a central pillar of De Stijl—albeit the source of friction among the members of the group.[121] De Stijl's emphasis on collaboration strategically positioned its work a pole apart from the tradition

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120. "Het nieuwe beeldingsbewustzijn houdt in: samenwerking aller plastische kunst om op den grondslag van *evenwichtige verhouding* tot een zuiveren monumentalen stijl te geraken. Een monumentale stijl houdt in: evenredige arbeidsverdeeling der verschillende kunsten. Evenredige arbeidsverdeeling houdt in, dat elk kunstenaar zich tot zijn eigen gebeid beperkt. Deze beperking houdt in: beelding met de vak-eigen middelen. Deze theorieën zijn door architecten van beteekenis reeds lang geleden verkondigd, doch in praktijk bleef het—op enkele uitzonderingen na—bij het oude, de architect nam dok de plaats van schilder en beeldhouwer in, wat natuurlijk tot de meest willekeurige resultaten leiden moest, zoo b.v. tot een picturale, sculpturale, in êên woord *destructieve bouwkunst.* Elke kunst eischt den geheelen mensch, zoowel architectuur, schilder- als beeldhouwkunst. Eerst wanneer dit, evenals in de oudheid, weder beseft wordt, kan er van ontwikkeling in de richting van een monumentalearchitectuur, van stijl sprake zijn. Dan vervalt ook vanzelf het begrip van toegepaste kunst en elk ondergeschikt-zijn van en aan welke kunst dan ook." Theo van Doesburg, "Aanteekeningen over Monumentale Kunst: Naar Aanleiding van twee Bouwfragmenten (Hall in Vacantiehuis te Noordwijkerhout. Bijlage I)" [Notes on monumental art: In response to two building fragments (A hall in the vacation house in Noordwijkerhout. Example 1], *De Stijl* 2, no. 1 (November 1918): 10.

121. See Troy, *De Stijl Environment* (see chap. 2, n. 47).

of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* undertaken during the previous century, in which totalizing environments were frequently under the control of the architect alone.[122]

With De Stijl, color became the pivotal aesthetic and theoretical tool with which the individual arts could be brought together. Specifically, it enabled the unification of furnishings and architecture without forcing the former to be subjugated to the latter. Each piece of painted furniture was intended to retain its independence as an object, which could then be integrated into a specific objectscape which responded to the color scheme designed for the enveloping architectural surface. Huszar had exactly this goal in his work for the Bruynzeel children's bedroom. In the journal *Bouwkundig Weekblad*, he described the completed project in the following terms:

> With this room, the planes could be combined with the furniture so that they complement each other; the deliberate placement of the bed makes this mutual fulfillment possible. If the furniture in a room is placed in an appropriate position, then it is accounted for. Each interior demands its own spatial-color-solution and its own complementary color-combination. As a result, there is always a new composition. Some artists mistakenly apply a decorative as opposed to a plastic solution; repetitions arise and therefore a mannerism results.[123]

Huszar's considered distribution of color onto the surfaces of the furniture and walls of the room was driven by his conception of color as an immaterial end.

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122. Yve-Alain Bois, "Mondrian and the Theory of Architecture," *Assemblage*, no. 4 (October 1987), 108.

123. "Bij deze kamer konden de vlakken zoo met de meubels verbonden worden, dat zij elkaar aanvullen; daar hierop is gerekend met de plaatsing der bedden enz. Worden in één kamer de meubels wel eens verplaatst, dan wordt daarmee rekening gehouden. Elk interieur eischt zijn eigen ruimte-kleuroplossing en zijn eigen complementaire kleur-samenstelling. Hierdoor steeds een nieuwe compositie. Bij een dekoratieve in tegenstelling tot beeldende oplossing, zooals sommigen verkeerd toepassen, ontstaan herhalingen en daardoor een dor manierisme." Huszar, "Over de modern toegepaste kunst," part 2, p. 76 (see chap. 1, n. 15).

Similar terms were marshaled to describe another interior color scheme designed, in this case, not by the De Stijl artist, but by the Dutch critic J. P. Mieras. In 1921, Huszar and Wils were commissioned by the portrait photographer Henri Berssenbrugge (1873–1959) to create a new addition to his studio, located on the Zeestraat in The Hague (fig. 7.35a–7.35c).[124] Wils built the studio with the intent of allowing as much light in as possible. He kept the ceilings high and inserted windows on three sides of the room. In addition, he included a skylight for further illumination. Two built-in benches were used to keep the floor of the room clear, while a small fireplace was tucked away in the back, so as not to protrude into the space.[125] Wils produced a suite of simple furniture for the space: a group of three low chairs for clients, a child's highchair, and three small tables.[126] The furniture rose to the height of the built-in benches, establishing a system of relations that linked the freestanding furniture to the built-ins, and thus the architectural setting at large. It was Huszar's application of color, though, that evoked the most comment from those critics who visited the completed studio at the invitation of Berssenbrugge. In a similar approach to that of the Bruynzeel bedroom, Huszar used carpets in black, blue, and burgundy to define spaces on the gray floor. Rectangles in variations of these tones and in yellow were applied to the walls. The chairs were painted black and echo the dark outlining of the built-in furniture. Mieras described the effect of

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124. Ex and Hoek, *Vilmos Huszar*, 101.

125. Michael White observed that the built-in bench which projected into the room was flush with the fireplace chimney breast, diminishing its presence. He noted that Rietveld used a similar strategy in his 1921 remodeling of a room for Truus Schröder at the patron's Biltstraat home in Utrecht. White, *De Stijl and Dutch Modernism,* 109.

126. Overy, *De Stijl,* 96 (see n. 6 above). The small coffee table echoes the cruciform top Wils had designed for the Dubbele Sleutel café; however, the Berssenbrugge table has abandoned the complex asymmetrical structure used in the café design.

the space in his review of the studio, published the following year in *Bouwkundig Weekblad.* He wrote compellingly:

> This studio of Van Berssenbrugge was a revelation when I stood in it. . . . In this spatial-color-studio . . . there is a unity, and that is the space and that space exists from colors. And these colors are *form-determining*. . . . The feelings that this space can generate are completely new. One lives in color, it is as if one takes a bath in color, one is *in* color. The sensation of this, however, is completely different from that of an ordinary colorful room. . . . Now this has been the revelation to me, to feel that it is possible to create spaces, which instead of being mathematically spatial, are physically spatial, and, among other things, are composed through colors.[127]

Mieras described the affecting sensation of color and its principal role in the unification and definition of the space. Each element, from the carpets, to the furniture, to the built-in features, to the walls, held a precise and clearly articulated role in the studio's color scheme. So much so that he added a brief note of criticism commonly directed towards such totalizing projects, stating, "The unity of such a space is so complete that everything that is not composed in it interferes with the unity. Thus, the roundness of an orange lying on one of the tables was a dissonance in the whole, and the photographic apparatus was also disturbing."[128]

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127. "Dit atelier nu van Berssenbrugge was mij, toen ik er in stond, een openbaring. . . . In dit ruimte-kleur-atelier . . . er is een eenheid en dat is de ruimte, en die ruimte bestaat uit kleuren. En deze kleuren zijn *vorm-bepalend*. . . . De gevoelens die deze ruimte kan opwekken, zijn geheel nieuw. Men leeft in kleur, het is of men een bad neemt in kleur, men is in kleur. De sensatie hiervan is echter geheel anders dan die van een gewoon kleurrijk vertrek. Dit nu is de openbaring aan mij geweest, te gevoelen dat het mogelijk is ruimten te scheppen, die in plaats van mathematisch ruimtelijk, psychisch ruimtelijk zijn, en o.a. te componeren door kleuren." J. P. Mieras, "Het atelier van Berssenbrugge te 's-Gravenhage" [The studio of Berssenbrugge in The Hague], *Bouwkundig Weekblad* 43, no. 16 (April 1922): 150–52.

128. "De eenheid van zulk een ruimte is n.l. zoo volstrekt, dat alles wat er niet in gecomponeerd is, de eenheid stoort. Zoo was de rondheid van een op een der tafeltjes liggenden sinaasappel een

The surprise Mieras felt on entering the chromatic space of the Berssenbrugge studio might have been expected. As Michael White observed, the application of color to modern interiors was unusual, particularly in the Netherlands. He added, "Even the most extreme and decorative Art Nouveau interiors produced in the Netherlands had only used color sparingly, preferring to work with different types of wood to create natural effects."[129] Hence the marshaling of color as the unifying device within the interior served another benefit: it distinguished De Stijl's approach to modern interior design from those of its contemporaries.

Huszar's production of interior designs accelerated as he sought additional collaborations, including several realized and unrealized projects between 1920 and 1924 with the artist Piet Zwart (figs. 7.36, 7.37). Yet one of his most compelling projects, and most illuminating for this discussion, was a music room he designed for the apartment of Dutch poet and writer Til Brugman and her partner, the musician Sienna Masthoff (1892–1959). Brugman was well acquainted with nearly the entire circle of artists around De Stijl. She published her Dadaist poem "R" in the pages of *De Stijl*, and provided a great deal of assistance to Van Doesburg by aiding the editor in translations, helping organize materials, and, importantly, managing subscriptions to the journal.[130]

As Ludo van Halem outlined in his important study of the space, in return for these favors Van Doesburg offered to create a color scheme for the poet's writing room

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dissonant in het geheel en ook het photografisch toestel werkte storend." Mieras, "Het atelier van Berssenbrugge," 152.

129. White, *De Stijl and Dutch Modernism*, 109.

130. Ludo van Halem, "Til Brugman's De Stijl Rooms: A 'Flat in The Hague' with Designs by Theo van Doesburg, Vilmos Huszar, Gerrit Rietveld, El Lissitzky and Kurt Schwitters, 1923–26," *The Rijksmuseum Bulletin* 65, no. 2 (2017): 130.

in her second-story flat in a recently built housing complex in the Heesterbuurt district of The Hague.[131] The apartment consisted of five rooms, with the writing room being one of three small spaces that were connected by a hallway. The writing room shared a wall with the larger, rear-facing music room, which was connected to a second large street-facing room by a pair of pocket doors. With the exception of a brief and vague note by Brugman describing the color scheme as "color—with color," no documentation exists of the actual appearance of the scheme Van Doesburg completed in 1923.[132] The artist's remodel of Brugman's writing room, though, spurred Masthoff to pursue a similar reimagination of her own music room shortly thereafter, of which there still remains photographic evidence.

Interestingly, along with several black-and-white photographs documenting Huszar's changes to Masthoff's music room, there exists a photograph showing a portion of the space before the remodel (fig. 7.38). The photograph was taken facing the corner of the room opposite the door. On the walls a high, light-colored dado was used, above which a frieze of floral-patterned wallpaper was applied. A cornice was also present around the top of the fireplace's chimney breast, underneath which a small mirror hung. The mantel of the fireplace appears to have been made of glazed brick. A Persian rug sat on the wooden floor, and from the ceiling above hung an electric lamp covered by a floral-print, semispherical shade. The expected accoutrements for a music room are also visible in the photograph: a wooden piano and chair had been placed in a shallow niche in

131. Van Halem, "Til Brugman's De Stijl Rooms," 131.

132. Such is also the case for the designs produced for the other small rooms by El Lissitzky and another begun by Kurt Schwitters, although likely not completed. See Van Halem, "Til Brugman's De Stijl Rooms," 131. In addition, Van Halem makes a sound argument for dating the designs to 1923, rather than 1924 as suggested by Nancy Troy.

front of the pocket doors, blocking access to the street-facing room. The visible curtain was likely used to hide the piano from view, allowing the room to function as a multiuse space. Finally, next to the piano a well-worn wooden armchair was placed in the corner. The photograph shows a room which displays the typical patterning, fabrics, and furnishings of a music room to be found in an early twentieth-century middle-class home.

Wanting to make dramatic changes to the space, Huszar sent Brugman and Masthoff a photograph of his design for the remodel, which also provides a better sense of the entire room (fig. 7.39). Several elements of the design were not implemented, likely on account of the expense. These included the removal of the molding on the ceiling and the cornice at the top of the chimney breast. Nevertheless, Huszar was able to successfully implement his color scheme throughout the space. The color scheme was conceived and executed in shades of gray. His decision to use only gray reflected previous experiments in painting that Huszar had conducted in 1918 (fig. 7.40). In these works, he had explored the creation of entirely abstract, gridded compositions premised on Ostwald's theories.[133] Writing critically on these works, Van Doesburg commented, "In this reconstruction according to the spirit, the new mode of plasticism finds its far-reaching cultural possibilities in all branches of art, industry, and society."[134] The Brugman room offered an opportunity to achieve just such an experimental expansion through the application of color in the social sphere.

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133. Van Halem, "Til Brugman's De Stijl Rooms," 146.

134. "In deze wederopbouw naar den geest, vindt de nieuwe beeldingswijze haar vèrstrekkende kultuurmogelijkheid tot in alle takken van kunst, industrie en samenleving." Theo van Doesburg, "Over het zien van nieuwe schilderkunst" [On seeing the new painting], *De Stijl* 2, no. 4 (February 1919): 44.

As a collection of photographs shows, one of the most pronounced changes to the room was the wall decoration (fig. 7.41a–7.41c). Huszar stripped the room of the dado and patterned-wallpaper frieze, replacing these outmoded features with a complex pattern of geometric forms. As Nancy Troy has discussed in detail, the arrangement of these forms was a fundamental departure in practice from the Bruynzeel bedroom and the Berssenbrugge Studio.[135] Huszar here mostly abandoned his previous practice of demarcating architectural features and spaces through framed geometric forms.[136] Rather, he allowed the geometric planes of gray to float freely across the wall. At times, the planes are imbued with a sense of transparency by applying darker grays at points of contact to give the appearance of interpenetrating forms—a technique possibly appropriated from László Maholy-Nagy's contemporaneous work.[137] The effect he created was of a seemingly immaterial surface of forms in shades of gray which opened rather than delineated the boundaries of the wall. Of critical importance to this process, as Troy noted, and as briefly addressed in chapter 4, was the way the gray forms traversed the room's corners:

> Huszar no longer adhered to the neutral surfaces provided by the architecture, but instead used color to obscure them and this to question if not deny their integrity. Literally and figuratively he crossed the bounds he had set himself in collaborations with Klaarhamer and with Jan Wils. As he aimed for a continuous reading of an integrated interior composition, his intention was to allow color

135. Troy, *De Stijl Environment*, 47.

136. In the room there are two exceptions to this change. For the chimney breast and above the piano he retained the practice of framing rectilinear forms. This was likely because these two areas of the room were the most clearly independent and static architectural features. See Van Halem, "Til Brugman's De Stijl Rooms," 145.

137. Troy, *De Stijl Environment*, 47.

> (again, in this case, several tones of gray), rather than architecture to play the major role in determining the spectator's experience of the spatial environment.[138]

In transgressing the boundaries of the corners of the room, Huszar also transgressed architecture's privileged role—traditionally aided by ornamentation—in dictating the experience of the built environment. His use of color to expand beyond the plane of the wall, however, did not stop at the boundaries of the room.

The photographs of the music room demonstrate a clear attempt on the part of Huszar to extend the dematerializing effect of color from the enveloping architectural surface of the walls to the various furnishings within the room. For example, the brick mantelpiece was painted over, possibly with a dark gray or black paint, in such a way that both the brick and mortar were covered. The mantelpiece thus appears as a unified structure of color. Huszar applied a similar strategy to his replacement for the hanging lamp. He removed the patterned fabric lampshade, and created a new pendant lamp consisting of two opal glass plates. The hovering plates of off-white, opaque glass echoed the geometric forms applied to the walls, extending the experience of those forms into the space of the room. This interconnection between wall decoration and interior furnishings was carried out in the fabric elements within the music room as well. Huszar replaced the Persian rug with simple rectilinear rugs in shades of gray. He also used shades of gray in the fabrics and pillows that covered the divan just to the left of the door.

The remaining furnishings in the room were not those initially illustrated in the design sent to Brugman and Masthoff. Instead the decision was made to commission several pieces of furniture from Rietveld to complete the space, including an armchair,

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138. Troy, *De Stijl Environment*, 47.

upright chair, table, and piano stool.[139] The chairs were delivered first. The armchair was painted entirely white (figs. 7.42), while the upright chair was painted gray—including the leather strap used as the backrest—and cream at ends of the wooden struts and chair seat. The *End Table* (fig. 7.27) was an original design, specially created for the music room. In stark contrast to the overall color scheme of the room, the table was painted in primary colors, white, and black. The strikingly colorful countermovement within the largely monochrome space followed Huszar's broader strategy of establishing a visual equivalency between the color scheme of the room and the modern musical movements which interested Masthoff.[140]

The interior design of the music room served as a paradigm for De Stijl's quest in the group's early years to reunify the interior under broadly aesthetic principles dependent upon the dematerializing capacity of color. With the music room, Huszar stripped the space of the competing materials, textures, and patterns that were so evocative of the decorative strategies and cultural values of the previous century. By removing material difference from the room through color, he was able to implement a progressive design which unified architectural surface and decorative object. He did so without incorporating the built-in features that remained tethered to a particular space,

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139. It is unclear why, or by whom, the decision was made to enlist Rietveld to commission the furniture for the space. Fortunately, all of the pieces designed for the room still exist, with the exception of the piano stool which was likely unrealized.

140. Van Doesburg directly criticized Huszar's approach in a letter to Brugman: "To judge from the photograph it's a very decorative solution. I see a lot of good things in it, but Mondrian didn't like it at all. 'Huszar doesn't understand any of it,' he said. It's a bit like all his solutions, following a particular trick. One movement thus, and one movement countering it. But a room isn't a merry-go-round." From an undated letter sent by Van Doesburg to Til Brugman, quoted and translated in Van Halem, "Til Brugman's De Stijl Rooms," 145. Van Doesburg's criticism of Huszar was possibly motivated more by his dissatisfaction at not having received the commission than by the aesthetic effects employed by his counterpart.

while he studiously and creatively avoided the sensuous surfaces that evoked the decadence of the past century. The design thus retained unity while communicating a sense of modern asymmetry and dynamism, both of which De Stijl artists believed spoke to the social structure and nomadic conditions of modern life.

Conclusion

The De Stijl project could not be complete without decorative objects. The adherents of the group theorized these works, from chairs to hanging lamps, as crucial points of connection between modern subjects and their engagement with the built environment. The attention given to these objects followed a broader reexamination of the place of furnishings within the decorative arts, as such objects began to receive the theoretical attention previously reserved for, and the rhetorical agency traditionally held by, ornamentation. Amid this shift in the signifying power of decorative objects, competing reform movements emerged which sought to define the form modern furnishings would assume, as well as their relationship to the architectural environment within which they were framed. Deeply engaged in these debates, De Stijl conceptualized its furnishings in two distinct ways. First, these objects were meant to redirect the direction, tempo, and symbolism of movement that characterized the modern condition of urban living. De Stijl endeavored to manipulate these conditions into an ordered experience. In their interiors these artists did not reject the pace of moving through the modern world, but rather sought to guide and control this sensation. Second, De Stijl artists viewed furniture as a fundamental tool in their project to transform architectural space into an entirely aesthetic environment, through the incorporation of antigravitational formal devices that equivocated, rather than affirmed, the structural continuity, and thus utility, of their

designs. Color served a central function in this endeavor. De Stijl marshaled color toward the establishment of a chromatic surfacescape. The group's emphasis on the colored surface was intended to stabilize the legibility of decorative objects. The decoupling of the external surface from historically entrenched systems of value inherent in an object's materiality and mode of production enabled De Stijl artists to market their designs to both working- and wealthier, middle-class clients—at least in theory. Finally, in De Stijl's approach to interior design, color leveled the artistic hierarchy that gave pride of place to architecture. The dematerializing capacity of the chromatic surface dissolved the boundaries among the various elements of the interior, from object to architectural surface. As a result, each element retained its independence, becoming unified only through a utopian endeavor of collective and collaborative effort between architect and artist.

8 Conclusion: A World for All and None

The De Stijl group's totalizing vision was fragmentary. Unlike their contemporaries, for example in Italy and Russia, De Stijl avoided engaging in a number of practices within the decorative arts and design that brought art into contact with daily life. From clothing to cutlery and ceramics to glassware, they left most utilitarian categories largely unexplored. Instead, as discussed over the course of this dissertation, De Stijl artists' interests and efforts were dedicated to what may best be understood as the "monumental" decorative art forms of wall painting, stained glass, weaving, furniture, and especially the architectural settings in which they would be implemented. Rarely, however, were these projects realized in the collaborative manner that the group always advocated. Instead, the group's utopian visions were brought together only in the pages of *De Stijl.* Along with reproductions of efforts in other media—such as painting, sculpture, music, poetry, and eventually film—the journal was the only place where the totalizing aesthetic world they imagined came close to being truly conveyed.[1]

The publication and its format, it must be noted, was modeled on the art and architecture journals that emerged in the 1890s. *De Stijl*, which followed the tradition set by earlier magazines such as *The Studio* or *Dekorative Kunst*—to name but two prominent examples—was, as Jeremy Aynsley noted, like them "concerned with the

1. In this sense, the journal functioned as the true *Gesamtkunstwerk* of the De Stijl group, as Olivier Schefer noted, "What is 'total' in the German expression *Gesamtkunstwerk* is precisely the gathering, the collection of different parts, and therefore the transgression of boundaries: *gesamt* is a past participle used as an adjective, derived from the archaic verb *samenen* (*sammeln* in its present form), which means 'to assemble, gather, collect.'" Olivier Schefer, "Variations on Totality: Romanticism and the Total Work of Art," trans. Danielle DuBois and Danielle Follett, in *The Aesthetics of the Total Artwork: On Borders and Fragments*, ed. Anke Finger and Danielle Follett (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011), 32.

discussion of self-consciously designed interiors, rather than interiors of the everyday. Whether actually executed or remaining only projects, designs were presented as ideals."[2] With *De Stijl*, the group united this graphic genre with a concerted aesthetic mission. Yet during the early years of the journal following its founding in 1917, De Stijl's ideals were conveyed piecemeal through the limited number of reproductions the publication could afford: a painting by Mondrian in one issue, followed by an interior by Van Doesburg or a piece of furniture by Rietveld in the next. The fragmentary display of De Stijl's larger aesthetic vision in image and accompanying text, however, was one of its greatest strengths. As Olivier Schefer has written on the fragmentary nature of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*: "This recurring phenomenon of an impossible realization is linked to the necessarily utopian character of many of these projects. For to leave the work incomplete and to voluntarily defer its execution are ways of keeping the idea alive, of refusing the reification of totality and the fetishism of the absolute within a finished work."[3] The "fragmentary" enabled an expansive, and crucially imaginative, mode of aesthetic thinking that could be embraced by a diverse body of architects, decorative artists, and members of the avant-garde throughout Europe, from the students at the Bauhaus to fellow Dutch designers.

Nevertheless, De Stijl sought a complete integration of art and thought, life and art. Through their theory and designs, the De Stijl affiliates projected the complete and total art work, one that Schefer acknowledged was unable to "be separated from a world of crisis and the expectation of an artistic redemption. The project of the unity of the arts,

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2. Jeremy Aynsley, "Design Change: Magazine for the Domestic Interior, 1890–1930," *Journal of Design History* 18, no. 1 (2005): 45.

3. Schefer, "Variations on Totality," 35.

then, was also proposed as the symbolic healing and mending of modernity that was frequently charged with egoism, individualism, and materialism by the very people that were inventing it (Baudelaire, Wagner, Nietzsche, and others)."[4] This underlying task of transformation and redemption, it should be emphasized, drove the reformative movements in the decorative arts developed in the middle of the nineteenth century by such figures as Ruskin and Morris. It was also, I want to suggest, what kept De Stijl from exploring the smaller-scale, predominantly utilitarian objects within the decorative arts, such as clothing or cutlery. Rather, and what has been an underlying current throughout this entire dissertation, the group's understanding—built upon a Nietzschean foundation— was that the creation of a "new man" necessitated an *aesthetic* transformation of the environment in which they lived. This monumental task demanded commensurately large-scale interventions that propelled the group toward their engagement with formats such as wall painting or stained-glass window design—categories of objects that could not be simply held in the hand but demanded to be understood through a 'totalizing' vision.

Thus De Stijl's project to create a modern, aesthetic environment can only begin to be understood when analyzed within the context of the history of the decorative arts. The decorative arts were *the* bellwether of many of the principal social, cultural, and political issues that modernity brought to the fore. As a result, the decorative arts were the nexus for much of the pivotal polemics that came to define the nature and form of modernism's aesthetic response to the very conditions of modernity. The group's name, and the journal's eponymous title, allude to this tradition. As discussed in chapter 2, by

4. Schefer, "Variations on Totality," 32.

evoking the term "style," De Stijl directly engaged the central concept in a nineteenth-century philosophical discourse that explored the intrinsic links between Western history, culture, and aesthetics in an effort to understand the forms modern society had assumed. Seeking to reconstitute such forms as a new style of life for the modern era, De Stijl formulated a seemingly paradoxical philosophical foundation that combined the inventive praxis of Nietzschean "forgetting" with a universalizing historical system of values rooted in Hegelian teleology. The former would lay the groundwork for the invention of a new aesthetic experience necessitated by the modern age, while the latter enabled such a transformation to remain connected to principles characteristic of all historical ages. To conceive of this new style, and its integration into the built environment, De Stijl members mined nineteenth- and early twentieth-century reform movements. As surveyed in chapter 3, the treatises and polemics put forth by the architects-cum-thinkers who led these movements played as great a role in shaping the boundaries of De Stijl's aesthetic program as did the avant-garde texts published by the German expressionists, Italian futurists, or French cubists.

By acknowledging the origins of many of De Stijl's intellectual and aesthetic positions in the decorative arts, this dissertation has advanced a fresh perspective on the group's formal projects in interior design, stained glass, and furniture. For example, chapter 4 exposed the group's frequent employment of the developed surface interior not as a neutral drafting device or an indicator of the extent of De Stijl's two-dimensional formalism, but rather as a revival of a practice that originated in eighteenth-century British interior design. Understanding the historical origin of this drafting method provides crucial insights into the manner in which De Stijl artists conceptualized the

modern interior as a heterotopic space that was necessary to the group's redemptive goal of constructing a new type of modern subject. The foregrounding of the decorative arts, as argued in chapter 5, gives a broader and more nuanced understanding of De Stijl's inclination toward abstraction in the built environment and the rational systems guiding it. The reforms taken in arts and crafts pedagogy around the turn of the century—exemplified by the widespread introduction of grammars of ornament—cultivated an impulse in the decorative arts toward abstraction, one which paralleled those in the fine arts. Furthermore, as demonstrated in chapter 6, focusing on the decorative arts enhances the role of an understudied aspect of De Stijl's practice: stained glass. Van Doesburg's forays into stained glass in particular shed light on the artist's conceptualization of embodied perception in the modern built environment, as well as his engagement with Nietzschean metaphors of music and dance and the conditioning of a modern form of subjectivity. Finally, as asserted in chapter 7, by approaching De Stijl furniture within the context of the history of furniture design, the social and gendered nature of the group's designs can be explored in greater detail. In addition, as scholarship on the decorative arts has long emphasized, the materiality of objects—that is, understanding the significance of the material qualities of De Stijl furniture—opens new windows on the group's theorization of color, and its relationship to concerns about value and appearance that had been present in the decorative arts since the beginning of the nineteenth century.

This dissertation was confined to the "formative years" of De Stijl, encompassing 1916 through 1923. This periodization of De Stijl's nearly decade and a half–long existence begins with the moment in which the group's participants, and their ideas, first began to coalesce; and spans a time when the core affiliates of De Stijl remained largely

in productive communication and collaboration with one another. This time frame also encompassed the developmental stage in De Stijl aesthetics and theory. This was the short period in which De Stil adherents were most engaged with prewar discourses on the decorative arts. It was only with the exhibition of De Stijl architecture and interior design held at Léonce Rosenberg's Galerie l'Effort Moderne in 1923 that this period began to end. The exhibition marked two important events in the group: first, the general dissolution of the original participants' association with *De Stijl*, and more significantly Van Doesburg's shift in his theoretical relationship to architecture. In the years that followed the exhibition, architecture was elevated to the apex of his avant-garde practice. Van Doesburg's shifting ideas on De Stijl praxis also coincided with the emergence of the International Style, which subsumed many national avant-garde movements—including De Stijl—into a transnational aesthetic discourse that came to govern the shape of architecture and the decorative arts for decades to come.

The refrain "art into life" has been—and continues to be—ubiquitously deployed by art historians to summarize the desire at the core of the historical avant-garde's praxis in the early twentieth century to transform the appearance and experience of everyday life. From the Russian constructivists and Czech cubists to Italian futurists and the German *Bauhäusler*, these movements strove to shift the agency of aesthetic creation from the artist-as-genius to the audience, from autonomy to accessibility, and from the mediated to the immediate. What this dissertation has endeavored to demonstrate through its analysis of the De Stijl group was that such artistic impulses paralleled or directly intersected with polemics and strategies that were central to those of the modern decorative arts. Only by restitching the histories of the avant-garde and decorative arts at

this decisive historical moment can one achieve a subtler understanding of the nature and forms that animated the De Stijl “idea” and that of the classical avant-garde in general.

Bibliography

The following bibliography has been divided into five sections to provide greater clarity to the resources consulted: the first section lists all archival resources used; section two lists all primary source works published in the pages of *De Stijl* or by central figures of De Stijl relevant to this project; the third section provides a generalized list of primary sources referenced; the fourth section lists all secondary literature on De Stijl and Dutch modernism consulted; and finally, the last section provides a list of all remaining secondary literature reviewed for this dissertation.

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Centraal Museum, Utrecht

Drachten Museum, Drachten

Het Nieuwe Instituut, Rotterdam

Kunstmuseum Den Haag, The Hague

Rijksbureau Voor Kunsthistorische Documentatie, The Hague

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